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Welfare reform

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Chris McCausland

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December 2010
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EDITORIAL

Editor Ian Macrae ian.macrae@disabilitynow.org.uk

Editorial Assistant Kelly Mullan Tel: 020 7619 7323

Design/Production Editor Jamie Trounce

Sub-Editor Stephen Games

Reporters Paul Carter Tel: 020 7619 7325;

paul.carter@disabilitynow.org.uk

Sunil Peck Tel: 020 7619 7321; sunil.peck@disabilitynow.org.uk

Cathy Reay Tel: 020 7619 7261; cathy.reay@disabilitynow.org.uk

ADVERTISING

Advertising Manager Patrick Durham-Matthews

Tel: 020 7619 7336;

patrick.durhammatthews@disabilitynow.org.uk

Advertising Administrator Wendy Jones

Tel: 020 7619 7120; wendy.jones@disabilitynow.org.uk

ADDRESS

Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW

Editorial: 020 7619 7323; fax: 020 7619 7331;

textphone: 020 7619 7332; email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

FREPOST RLZU-YJSG-ACBJ, *Disability Now*, 800 Guillat

Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne ME9 8GU

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EDITORIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR BRANDS
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editorial

Help us get it right

At *Disability Now* we feel very certain about the value and importance of what we do. There aren't many other places where you can go to hear from such a range of disabled writers, in a variety of styles and on such a spread of topics, from celebrity and personality profiles to personal stories; from exotic travel to domestic transport issues; from campaigning columnists to product reviews.

“The information which you give us about your magazine will be used to help us to shape our content for the future and be more certain that we're giving disabled people what they want”

But every so often it's wise to check that what we're delivering is what you want. Is there too much or too little sports coverage? Do you like our celebrity and personality profiles?

How important is the way in which disabled people are portrayed in the media to you? And do we give enough space to the issues which particularly affect the way you live?

In your copy of this month's issue, you'll find a short and easy survey form which we'd like as many readers as possible to complete. You can tell us which articles you read and which you skip. You can say what you'd like more of and what you wouldn't miss.

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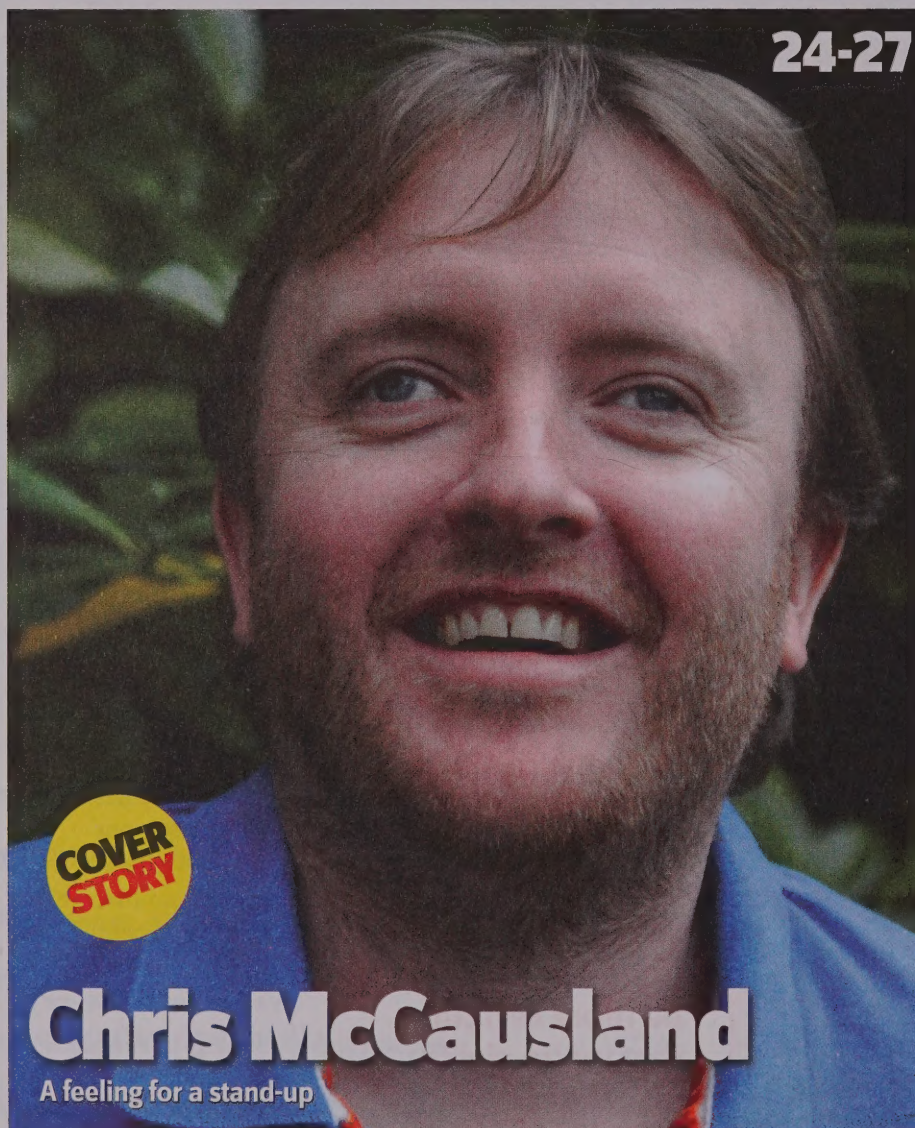
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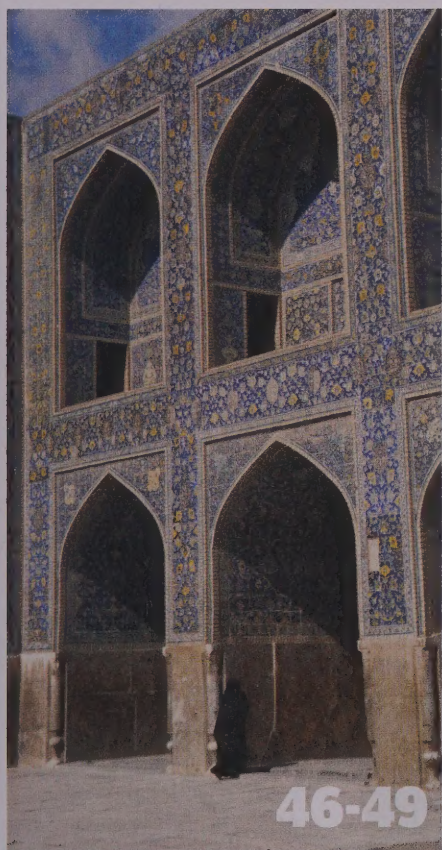
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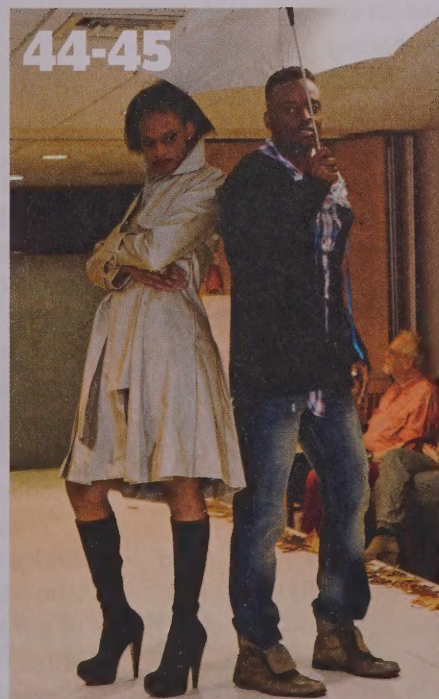
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Campbell trumps cuts with rights

Ian Macrae

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton has been thought in some quarters to have become more emollient, more measured in how she expresses her views.

Indeed, she says herself, "I now tend to talk about fairness, even though equality and human rights, in my view, is a far more appropriate framework when talking about disabled people as equal citizens."

While she has always remained passionate about certain issues – in particular attempts to row back the law on assisted suicide or euthanasia – her support for the replacement of direct disability anti-discrimination legislation by a single Equalities Act, together with her refusal to join in the criticism of Trevor Phillips' style in running the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggested to some that she had no real interest in boat-rocking.

But, following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and as Iain Duncan Smith published his far-reaching welfare reforms – billed as the



biggest thing since Beveridge – she's been quick to show people that her colours remain firmly pinned to the disability rights mast.

And, as ever, her concerns arise directly out of the lived experience of disabled people.

"I now receive a steady stream of mail from people who are having their personal support packages either reduced or cut altogether, leaving them

dependent on charity, family and friends. I believe we are in danger of stepping back in time, where independent living was something enjoyed by the rich or the odd highflyer who could earn serious money."

She's worried too about the tone of current political and media mood music.

"I get very depressed with the relentless characterisation of the unemployed and disabled people on

Incapacity Benefit, scrounging the system.

"I'm not sure what's worse, being cast as a victim or a scrounger. Disabled people have been plagued by negative stereotypes for centuries and it doesn't seem to be getting any better with the current portrayal."

She's well known for having long been a campaigner on independent living which for her has always been much more of a reality than merely a concept or glib phrase.

Now, with local authorities faced with central government funding cuts and central government refusing to ring-fence what additional money has been made available for social care, she sees a real threat on the horizon.

"I don't trust local authorities not to use some of that money to offset some of their major deficits in other public service funding streams. In addition some local authorities still do not know the meaning of independent living and the right to control, so I do not feel they should be completely left to channel the social care money into

what they think is in the best interests of local disabled people."

"I keep insisting that the CSR is a human rights issue affecting the right to a private life, a right to live in the community and even the right not to be subject to inhuman and degrading treatment. But of course if you are one of those who believe the Human Rights Act should be contained to civil liberties and have nothing to do with economic rights, then independent living is stuffed.

She also regards with wariness the "back to work" zeal of current reforms and the emphasis on using that as a lever for forcibly moving disabled people off benefits.

"There are some real opportunities for disabled people to find a way back to work without dramatically losing their benefits as they do so with the current system. However, forcing people to work in what appears to be low skilled jobs, in exchange for benefits is in great danger of being

exploitative. I don't have a problem with structured productive occupation as a pathway back into the workforce (especially those who have been out of work for years) as long as it is carried out in an empowering and respectful way and in full collaboration with the people concerned."

There's no lack of passion either in her response to Government proposals to withdraw the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to people living in residential care.

She sees this as directly counter to the need for and spirit of greater moves towards independent living, particularly in a sector where institutions may already be somewhat off the pace.

"Residential care homes are no longer, or should not be, places to hide people away in or to deny them opportunities the rest of us take for granted: independence, choice, access to public life and maybe, for those who can, eventually the possibility of work and independence."

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400,000 could **lose** DLA alliance claims

Nearly half a million disabled people could lose their Disability Living Allowance according to a leading disability rights charity.

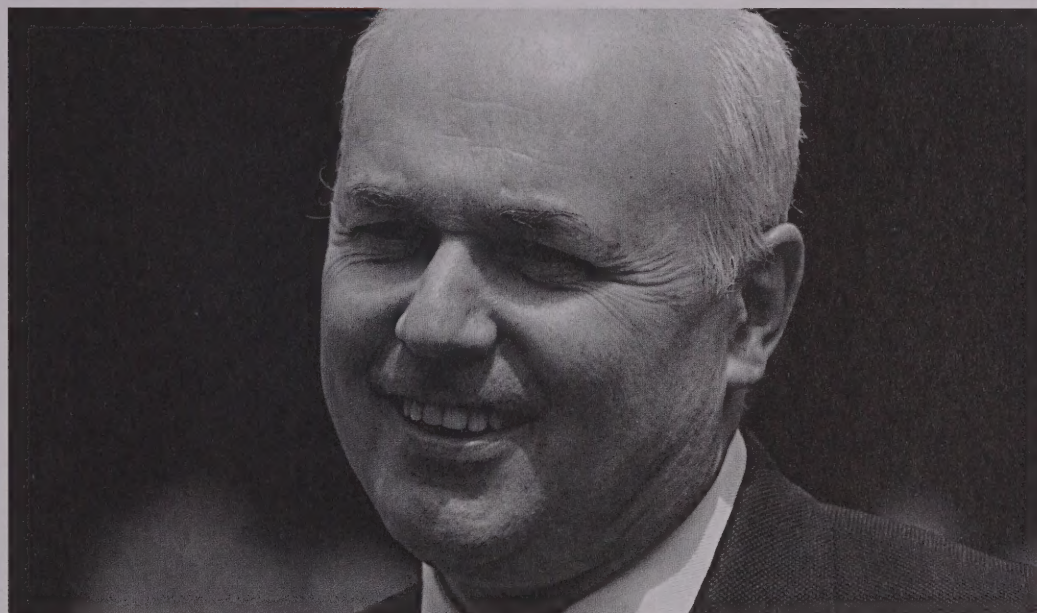
Using direct analysis of Government figures published as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), Disability Alliance calculates that 400,000 people would be taken off the benefit by the implementation of new assessment procedures.

In addition, the charity believes that thousands more would have to lose their entitlement to out of work benefits if Government savings targets of £2 billion are to be met.

Meanwhile, other charities reacted negatively to announcements contained in the Government's Welfare Reform white paper published in November.

Richard Hawkes, Chief Executive of Scope (the charity which publishes *Disability Now*) said: "The fact remains that disabled people who are able to work, who want to work – are still unlikely to find work because there are so few jobs available.

"This white paper does not address the state of the employment market today,



STEVE PUNTER

Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

nor take into consideration the reality of people's lives.

"And worryingly, it plans to introduce a 'regime of sanctions for those that don't play by the rules'."

Chief Executive of mental health charity Rethink, Paul Jenkins, also expressed concern about the emphasis on getting people back to work and the means by which they'll be assessed.

"The proposed conditions attached to Job Seeker's Allowance will add to the worries of those who already fear they will be wrongly assessed as fit to work under the new benefits test.

"It is now even more essential that benefits

assessments really reflect people's ability to work in the long-term. Mental illness affects people differently from day to day, and if someone is wrongly found to be fit for work, and put on Job Seeker's Allowance, they could now be forced to do inappropriate work or lose their benefits. Jobcentre Plus staff tell us that they don't have mental illness expertise, yet they will decide who to send on these work programmes."

David Congdon, Head of Campaigns and Policy at Mencap focused on the likely impact on people with learning difficulties of proposals to time limit

unemployment benefits.

"We are very concerned that punitive measures such as benefit withdrawal will adversely impact people with a learning disability. Failure to find employment does not necessarily reflect an 'unwillingness to cooperate', but is more likely to be as a result of employer prejudice and a lack of support.

"On average it takes more than a year for someone with a learning disability to be 'work ready' and find employment.

"There must be a more flexible and personalised approach to helping people into the job market rather than this one size fits all approach."

newsupdate

Legal aid loss leaves families short

Sunil Peck

Women who took a drug to control epileptic seizures while pregnant, which led to their children being born with multiple disabilities, say that the withdrawal of legal aid to fund their fight for compensation is a “crushing disappointment”.

The women say that they were not made aware of all the possible side effects of taking Epilim during pregnancy.

The case, brought by the families of a hundred children against the pharmaceutical company Sanofi Aventis, had been funded by legal aid since 2005.

But weeks before the case was due to be heard in the High Court, the Legal Services Commission (LSC) announced that it was withdrawing legal aid.

Its executive director for commissioning, Hugh Barrett, said that the Commission could only spend taxpayers’ money when it thought that there was a “reasonable prospect”



MARK THOMAS / SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

of a court victory.

Simon Wigglesworth, deputy chief executive of Epilepsy Action, said that the fact that the families were being denied the opportunity to fight for compensation in court was “disappointing”.

He said: “This is not the first time the LSC has withdrawn funding for this group of claimants. It was our understanding that they recommitted the funding in 2008 and that the case would get to trial.”

Catherine Cox’s nine year old son Matthew was born with learning disabilities, abnormal bone development, epilepsy and problems with his joints.

But when she was pregnant she was told that taking Epilim would only increase the risk of him being born with spina bifida or a cleft lip.

She said that it was a “crushing disappointment” that the families would not get a fair hearing in court.

She said: “It was the

opportunity to provide Matthew with a fund – if we won – which meant that he could have an income enabling him to have independence and a place in society rather than having to live off hand-outs and services provided by the council.”

Nick Dobrik, who has been involved in the campaign for compensation for people disabled by the drug thalidomide, said that the withdrawal of legal aid was a “terrible tragedy” for the families involved with the Epilim case.

He said: “It’s high time that legislation was passed so that when cases like this happen in future, there’s money, like there is to compensate people involved in car accidents, so that people don’t have to fight to get adequate financial assistance.”

Lucy Scott-Moncrieff, a legal aid solicitor, said that although the withdrawal of legal aid had left the families in an “awful situation”, the decision would not have been prompted by the Government attempting to save money and would not set a precedent should similar cases arise in the future.

The future of the case remained unclear as *Disability Now* went to press.



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ruthpatrick

Work Choice: a drop in a leaky bucket



With the latest series of *The Apprentice* reaching its finale, meaning that we've discovered which "lucky" contestant walked away with first prize – a £100,000 job with Lord Sugar, **Ruth Patrick** says it's timely to turn our attentions from reality TV to the lived reality faced by disabled people seeking to enter paid employment

If you're disabled and looking for work, the reality – rather less glamorous than that of the TV show – is one of deep-rooted physical, societal and attitudinal barriers which too often operate to hi-jack disabled people's efforts to secure work. As the Government continually reminds us, there is the "missing million": a million disabled people aspiring to enter work but still outside the labour force. At the same time, there are some disabled people who simply cannot work due to the severity and nature of their impairments. Unfortunately, all must endure Government rhetoric, increasingly rubbing off on public opinion, which suggests that work is the primary duty of the responsible citizen, with benefit claiming caricatured for all but the most vulnerable as a passive, rather unpatriotic lifestyle choice.

But do not panic, help is at hand and all will be well! In October, the Coalition



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launched Work Choice – a specialist programme of support to assist disabled people with the most complex barriers to move into paid employment. Work Choice replaces the support previously provided by Workstep, Work Preparation and Job Introduction. Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller promises: "Work Choice will ensure people facing the biggest barriers to work get the intensive support they need."

Well forgive the cynicism, Maria, but I for one am unconvinced. The help provided by Work Choice will reach a rather miserly 23,000 disabled people a year. No doubt the Government would justify this by arguing that the specialist help offered by Work Choice will be targeted at those facing the most intransigent barriers, with the rest supported by the shiny new Work Programme, due to be launched in Summer 2011.

However, hundreds of thousands of disabled people come up against complex barriers to work, particularly those on Incapacity Benefit who will have their eligibility for benefits re-assessed from March next year.

These drastic and ill-judged reforms will employ a faulty Work Capability Assessment to determine existing disability benefit claimants' capability for work, with the Government estimating that some 23% of Incapacity Benefit claimants will be found "fit for work". Instead of the paltry Work Choice, a much more ambitious programme is required if the affected individuals are to enter work rather than simply being shoved off disability benefits onto the markedly less generous and more demanding Job Seeker's Allowance.

What is more, these reforms coincide with sweeping cuts to public services which are anticipated to result in around 500,000 job losses in the public sector. This is

bad news for disabled people, who have traditionally found the public sector more accessible and disability-friendly than the corporate world. So we have a

If the Government really wants to support the missing million, it must take radical action to create a more equal and accessible workplace for all

situation which sees the sector most amenable to employing disabled people shrink, at the same time as a large proportion of disabled people are being "encouraged" off welfare into work.

Whilst Work Choice is a worthy programme, its modesty makes it incapable of even beginning to address the scale of the challenge. Indeed, the Government's whole approach on disability and employment is flawed. All their energies and resources are focused on "supporting"

disabled people to become more "employable" and confident – or "job ready" to use the correct jargon. This rather perniciously suggests that it is disabled people who need to change to adapt to the demands of the workplace. The reality, as we all know, is rather different. Where change is required is with society, and with the endurance of inaccessible workplaces,

unavailable transport and the ongoing culture of stigma, discrimination and low expectations of the capabilities and expertise of disabled people. If the Government really wants to support the missing million, it must take radical action to create a more equal and accessible workplace for all. Work Transformation not Work Choice is what is required.

→ Have your say

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disabilityrights

"Cuts kill" drives protest agenda

It's not every day a new protest group takes to the streets, but with disabled people feeling unfairly targeted and hardest hit by Government spending cuts, **Eleanor Lisney** tells us why it's once more time for action

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) has been formed to campaign against the onslaught of coalition Government cuts affecting disabled peoples' right to live independently.

The co-founders of DPAC organised a leading role for disabled people in the mass rally against the June spending cuts which took place during the Conservative conference in Birmingham.

Our message to politicians is that "cuts kill" and we already know of disabled people who have committed suicide because they were so scared about losing their care and support packages.

There are three elements to our strategy, the first of which is taking to the streets in protest.

Although we staged a DPAC demo in Westminster which took place while the results of the spending review were being announced in Parliament, we feel that the campaign will be far more effective in



We already know of disabled people who have committed suicide because they were so scared about losing their care and support packages

the long-run if it's waged in alliance with other grassroots organisations that are also campaigning against the cuts.

As well as joining protests in Birmingham during October and November, we joined a demo in Hyde Park organised by

the campaigning network Mad Pride.

Our next big rally is the TUC rally in March 2011 and we are doing all we can to secure funding to cover the access needs of disabled people interested in joining us.

The second element of our strategy is encouraging disabled people to write to their MPs to urge them to support an Early Day Motion, 706, which draws attention to the social exclusion and poverty the spending cuts will exacerbate among disabled people.

We are also using Facebook and Twitter to

engage disabled people and have also set up an online protest page for people unable to attend rallies.

It's still too early to have any idea about how effective our campaign has been so far or what we will achieve and we are still reeling from the savage cuts announced in the spending review. But we are gaining support among disabled people in the UK, several European countries, the U.S. and Malaysia.

If we do not campaign we will be failing those disability activists who fought for the rights we now have and future generations of disabled people. To give up without a fight would be a betrayal.

•• For more information visit disabledpeopleprotest.wordpress.com or contact Linda Burnip, a co-founder of DPAC on 07714 927533 or visit the DPAC Facebook group at <http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/group.php?gid=121196194603310>
• Eleanor Lisney is a co-founder of DPAC and was talking to Sunil Peck

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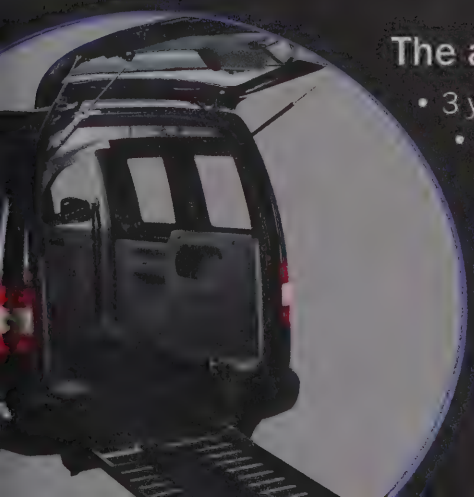
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mediawatch

By Cathy Reay



Here, there and everywhere!

As the annual round of media awards champion 2010's breakthrough talent and positive representation, **Cathy Reay** ponders whether the times really are a-changin' for disabled people yearning for a career on camera

It's that time of year when the tuxes come out and the bubbly starts flowing – yes, it's awards season. This year, RADAR and the Cultural Diversity Network diversity awards are among those recognising extraordinary disabled talent and we couldn't be more thrilled. But does it signify a new era of success for disabled people in the media?

Through 2010, we have witnessed some fantastically talented disabled people chosen for roles that have gone a long way to establish, on a wider scale, how seriously we want to be taken, whether as actors, newsreaders, musicians, writers, or whatever else.

From an incredible turn from young newcomer Genevieve Barr in BBC1 drama *The Silence*, to Shannon Murray securing a

Given that roughly one in seven of the overall population of Great Britain is disabled, we have yet to achieve substantial representation of disability in the media

modelling contract with Debenhams, to the groundbreaking Channel 4 drama *Cast Offs*, to Wesley Nelson bringing a young Ian Dury to life in a big-screen production of *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*, to Channel 4's incredible push for disabled presenters for the 2012 Paralympics, to Jamie Beddard acting on a West End stage. Shall we go on? Disabled people are on television, radio, in books, newspapers, on billboards

and on stage and, mostly, for all the right reasons.

Actress Genevieve Barr, recently seen in BBC1 drama *The Silence*, said she's delighted that the media industry is becoming more representative, but added: "Proportionally, given that roughly one in seven of the overall population of Great Britain is disabled, we have yet to achieve substantial representation of disability in the media."

"That's not to say that programmes need to be disability-centred, just like a lot of people's lives aren't disability-centred, but we need more. People need to be more open-minded that someone or something with a disability can be as interesting and engaging as everything else we see on screen and print is."

Of course there have been several big hiccups

along the way: Davina McCall's comment about walking "like a retard" on *Big Brother*, Paddy Power's blind footballer advert, *The Sun's* campaign against "benefit scroungers" and *Fonejacker's* research as a fake disabled person for a comedy skit are just a few that this column has uncovered over the year.

In addition to that, there are still cases of non-disabled people cast in disabled roles: Kevin McHale portraying the role of Artie in American teen drama *Glee*, while here in the UK Colin Firth is headed for an Oscar win for convincingly mimicking a stammer in the forthcoming film *The King's Speech*.

"I think we are getting to the point of all disabled parts being played by disabled people. However, it is still happening,

particularly in American TV shows," said actor David Proud, who until recently played *EastEnders'* first wheelchair-using character Adam Best.

"The next step is to really make sure the amount of disabled people on screen increases, and the roles they play are high profile and in the mainstream," he added.

Channel 4 news correspondent Benjamin Cohen said: "Disabled people are becoming much more visible in the media and the arts and this helps encourage disabled

people to apply at all levels of the industry, on and off screen, but many challenges still exist.

"Thinking about the industry as a whole, I'm sure there is still ingrained and often unvoiced discrimination of disabled people. Perhaps there is a fear that variable disabilities, like my own, can be difficult to manage from a personnel perspective. Unpredictability can add to the cost of employing a disabled person, and I know from my friends that this has prevented them from

securing jobs in the media."

Genevieve added: "Disability still needs to be more attractive and engaging to a mainstream audience. We need more writers, actors and people in the industry developing opportunities that explore issues and introduce characters that have disabilities."

There has been a positive leap forward for disability in

the media, but we know more still needs to happen. More disabled people need to be employed into non-disabled roles, more disabled people need to be given more visible jobs, and most importantly, more disabled people need to feel they have equal opportunity and right to get wherever they want to be, whether onscreen or off.

→ Editor's note

This is Cathy's last Mediawatch as she's moving on to take up new opportunities. Thanks to her for some fantastic pieces and terrific journalism.

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politics

Miller hits choppy water on cuts

In recent weeks, Conservative politicians have tended to remain in the background while the Lib Dems have taken the flack for the welfare cuts announced by the Treasury.

But during a recent meeting of all party parliamentary groups concerned with disability, Maria Miller (pictured), the Tory MP and minister for disabled people, spoke face to face with campaigners, MPs and peers concerned about cuts to the welfare system.

A packed room listened while Miller, speaking a few days after the Comprehensive Spending Review was published, said that savings were vital with the deficit costing the country £43 billion in interest.

She said that although the cuts would be tough on disabled people, the Government had tried to be fair when deciding where the axe should fall.

Audience members were not impressed. Lord [Brian] Rix, who is president of the charity Mencap, rubbished the "we're-all-in-this-together" line pushed by the Coalition and expressed anger that 60,000 disabled people in residential care would be unable to afford to go out because of cuts to their Disability Living

With the reality of coalition welfare reform plans beginning to hit home, **Sunil Peck** reports from a Westminster meeting where disabled people weren't the ones feeling besieged



Allowance (DLA).

The audience responded with enthusiastic applause.

There was also applause for former Labour minister for disabled people, Anne McGuire, who questioned the move to impose a limit of one year on claimants in the work-related category of Employment and Support Allowance. It would take many of them a lot longer than that to find work, she said.

Miller, who was under pressure to give short answers because of time constraints, addressed all the points put to her, but instead of approvals, only prompted laughs of incredulity.

She justified cutting DLA for people in residential care on the grounds that the money is duplicated in care packages. She then suggested that giving local authorities control over their budgets would ensure that disabled people did not miss out on any of the £1 billion that has been pledged for social care and support services but not been ring-fenced.

With local authorities cutting support services and unemployment rising, it's no surprise that many disabled people fail to see how the Government's talk of creating opportunity and promoting independent living can be plausible.

With this disparity, reflected in the meeting, about what constitutes fairness, the question is how many disabled people will be forced into poverty before the coalition Government has a change of heart?

Baroness [Tanni] Grey-Thompson was greeted warmly for drawing attention to the plight of disabled jobseekers who are desperate for work but are denied jobs because of discriminatory attitudes among employers.

→ Have your say

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Gaza: suspicion and resistance

Human rights activist **Jody McIntyre** took advantage of a temporary opening in the border to visit disabled people in the Gaza Strip

It was during a solo trip around South America, in my wheelchair, that I heard about Israel's invasion of Gaza. Ever since the war in my grandmother's native Lebanon, in 2006, the question of Palestine had always been a pertinent issue to me, but Gaza's devastation had made it all the more urgent.

Getting into Gaza was

never going to be an easy task. Ever since Hamas were democratically elected in 2006, Israel have been maintaining a land, naval and aerial blockade of the tiny strip of land, home to around 1.5 million people.

In the first days of 2010, however, an exception had been made; part of the border would be opened for 24 hours, to allow a small

By the fourth checkpoint, it was plain sailing. Early the next day, I was making my way into Gaza

amount of aid to pass through. I was staying with an Egyptian friend in Cairo.

There were around 1500 foreigners in Cairo that week, all hoping to travel to

the Gaza Strip. The Egyptian authorities were determined to stop them from doing so – demonstrations in the capital were immediately crushed, and several checkpoints were set up across the Sinai desert to prevent foreigners from getting further than the Suez Canal.

However, with my determination and the Arabic I had learnt from a

previous six months in Palestine on my side, the mother of another Egyptian friend's family took me to the bus station, explaining to staff that I was her son, hoping to travel to al-Arish [a small town in the Sinai, about half-way between Cairo and Rafah] to see my father. The plan worked, and in minutes I was on the next bus to al-Arish.

At the first checkpoint, the police asked for my passport. I answered, in Arabic, that I was an Egyptian and didn't have one. They insisted, but when I said that I couldn't walk, simply shrugged their shoulders and walked off the bus. By the fourth checkpoint, it was plain sailing. Early the next day, I was making my way into Gaza.

Once I had arrived in Gaza city, I met up with two brothers from the PFLP who had agreed for me to stay with them, on the condition that I didn't tell anyone where I was staying. Bullet marks pocked the front of their house; results of the 2007 Fatah-Hamas inter-fighting.

Unfortunately, my electric wheelchair had broken in Cairo, so I spent the next few weeks travelling the city by foot. Luckily for me, virtually

every car in Gaza doubles as a shared taxi, so I quickly discovered that by raising your arm at any street corner, you were only a one shekel [around 20p] ride away from anywhere else in the city.

I met up with Hamdan Jew'ei, a 26-year-old Palestinian man who was born with cerebral palsy. I asked Hamdan how living under the Israeli occupation made life more difficult for disabled Palestinians.

The soldier told me to leave my crutches on the ground, but I told him that without crutches I would not be able to stand, so he would have to bring me a chair before I gave him the crutches

"I remember once, just before the second Intifada," he replied, "I was taking a bus from Ramallah to Bethlehem, through Jerusalem, and we were stopped at a couple of checkpoints. At one of the checkpoints, an Israeli soldier stopped the bus, and out of all the passengers, he only asked me to get out of the bus. I told him, look,

I am using crutches to walk, you can see I'm a disabled person, so why are you asking me to get off the bus? And he said, because you are disabled, get off the bus. So I jumped down; it was difficult for me to get down because of the height, and of course the bus drove away.

The soldier told me to leave my crutches on the ground, but I told him that without the crutches I would not be able to stand, so he would have to bring me a chair before I gave him the crutches. So he did, and then I asked him what they wanted to do with my crutches. He said, look, you might be a disabled person, but we consider you as the most dangerous people. He told me that I could be carrying something within my crutches which could be a danger to the security of the State of Israel."

Hamdan's sentiments certainly rang true with my own experiences. Before my trip to Gaza, I had spent six months living in the West Bank village of Bil'in, situated on the path of Israel's wall, which had stolen half of the village's land. The Israeli army would invade Bil'in almost every night, and the fact that I was in a wheelchair certainly didn't put them

off using violence against me. I remember during one night raid, a soldier rolling a sound grenade directly under my wheelchair, so that it exploded up into my face. I wonder if he felt that my wheelchair posed the same "danger to the security of the State of Israel" as Hamdan's crutches?

It was in Bil'in that I met Rani Bornat, a 29-year-old man who had been shot in the back of the throat on the very first day of the second Intifada, and paralysed and in a wheelchair ever since. Me and Rani spent many evenings together in his front garden, looking out at the fields of olive trees, cut through the centre by the snaking wall Israel had built.

"Rani, do you think the Israeli army treat you differently now that you are in a wheelchair?" I asked him.

"Jody..." he replied, "They treat me exactly the same. They don't care if I am in a wheelchair or if I'm walking – according to them, I am a threat to the State of Israel, as ridiculous as that may sound. But it's not important if you're in a wheelchair or not ... what's important are the ideas... the resistance, that's in your mind."

Kate's slow walk on fast track

Widely touted as one of the hottest young talents in British TV production, Markthree Media's **Kate Monaghan** tells us why she works in TV, what she watches on TV and why she might always turn first to our Backlash column

What made you want to work in TV?

When I was about eight my parents took me to a CBBC event called The Big Bash where I watched CBBC being broadcast live right in front of my eyes. From that point on, I was hooked.

What's your favourite TV show of all time?

I think my favourite of all time has to be *The West Wing* – there's nothing else like it. I think *Spooks* is still top of its game, and don't tell anyone but *Strictly* and *X-Factor* are also compulsive viewing.

What do you like most about your job?

I love the random nature of what I do. One day I'll be dashing around on a shoot making sure everything's running smoothly, and the next I'll be sitting in an office discussing how we can make a series of *Come Dine With Me* but with dogs (that idea's copyrighted by the way).

What do you like least about it?

I think there's a lot of instability in our industry and no one seems to be in the same job for long – I'm lucky in that running my own company means I know I have a job, but at the same time I only have a job while work keeps coming in.

How do commissioning editors react to you as a disabled person?

I think that most of them are quite cool about it to be honest. If we're talking about disability issues then I think I'm taken more seriously, otherwise I'm pretty sure I'm just viewed as any other producer. Which is exactly as it should be.

What makes you angry?

Aside from injustice, inequality and world poverty... I really get angry at people who say they hate slow walking people.



There's a group on Facebook called something like 'I want to punch slow walking people in the back of the head'. As a long-time shuffler, this makes me really cross and it's totally unjustified too I think. What's so wrong with walking slowly?!

If you were Prime Minister, what would you do to improve things for disabled people?

Well I'd instantly stop all these ridiculous changes to DLA and ESA assessments. Plus I'd give everyone free chocolate.

Who's your favourite disabled person ever?

I have to say that *Disability Now* journalist Paul Carter is my favourite ever disabled person. He is one of the funniest people on the planet, cheers me up whenever I feel down and I think he's quietly done a lot for disabled people that doesn't get recognised half as much as it should. I'd also say Ash Atalla, Mat Fraser and Tanni Grey-Thompson are up there too, but Paul just pips them to the post.

How would you sum yourself up in ten words or less?

I absolutely hate these questions! I couldn't do it so crowd-sourced the answer instead... Apparently I am a: kind, determined, enthusiastic, engaging, football-loving, open, bossy, creative, smiley, clever-clogs.

Do you have any special or hidden talents?

The only hidden talent I can think of is that I can fit my whole fist in my mouth. That's impressed you hasn't it?!

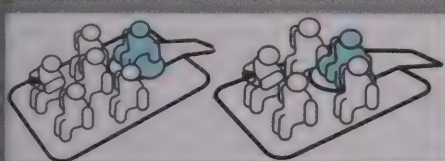
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Scouse in the house

He's officially the funniest blind man out of Liverpool; he's just won a prestigious Channel 4 talent trawl but, as he tells **Sunil Peck**, Chris McCausland is the same "mummy's boy" off-stage as on

Chris McCausland was on stage at the Edinburgh Festival when he was interrupted by some people in the audience chatting.

"I mentioned it and they went quiet. It happened again and I pulled them up on it and I made a joke about going into stealth mode like a submarine to hide from the blind guy. In the end it

turned out that someone had received a text saying that his brother had been taken into hospital." With the room feeling "awkward", McCausland asked in surprise "what are you doing here? Go to the hospital!"

"But once they'd gone I said 'come to think of it, that might have been the guy I hit in my car on the way to the gig!'"

According to his website, McCausland is probably the world's only blind professional comedian. But he has worked hard to make a name for himself for being funny rather than for being blind.

McCausland used to have a lot of sight which he began to lose ten years ago because of the degenerative eye



“I’m a mummy’s boy! I wouldn’t feel comfortable talking about experimenting with sex toys or paying for hookers”

JAMIE TROUNCE

condition retinitis pigmentosa. He talks openly about his blindness and is clearly not in denial or “trying to avoid” his disability, but he doesn’t want it to define his comedy.

“If I do an hour, I don’t mind doing five or eight minutes of blind stuff, as long as it’s funny and it’s not clichéd.”

The “funny stuff” includes the time

McCausland missed the barber’s and walked into the undertaker’s for a haircut, and watching the football with his mates in the pub when the radio commentary is eight seconds ahead of what’s happening on the screen.

But his act also has observations about a woman travelling several stops on the tube with her hair trapped in

the doors, the advantages of sleeping at a decent temperature in the spare room after rowing with his girlfriend because she gives off so much body heat in bed, and the differences in drinking culture between comedy clubs in the UK and New York.

“I always think it’s got to be something that I wouldn’t mind my mum and dad hearing. I’m a mummy’s boy! I wouldn’t feel comfortable talking about experimenting with sex toys or paying for hookers.”

A self-confessed geek, McCausland studied maths and further maths at the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford and graduated with a degree in computer science in 2000 from Kingston University.

As his sight worsened, it became impossible for him to design websites that looked good.

A fan of Eddie Izzard since the mid-90s, he fell into a career in stand-up in 2003 while off sick from a call centre job with shingles.

“I was bored shitless! I’d always been a fan of comedy and collected stand-up videos and I was sat at home looking on the internet for a DVD or new stand-up that I might not have seen.”

He came across an online advert which said “you can be a stand-up comic in one week!”

It seemed like a “cool job” but one that he could never do.

“Then I thought you know, I’m sure loads of people have a go and I’m sure there’s loads of really shit people who do [he laughs]. I wonder if I could write something funny.

“I can’t even remember any of the jokes. Put it this way: the jokes didn’t survive.”

His first shot as a stand-up happened three months later at an open-mic night for new acts.

“You don’t get paid, but they





giggled and chuckled enough to make me want to have another go – even though I wasn’t relaxed and did it with no intonation whatsoever.”

As someone who “has no shame and is not shy”, he persisted and in his first year as a stand-up, McCausland finished in the top three of pretty much every national competition and won the title of Jongleurs Best Newcomer.

He’s honed his act now and his delivery is self-assured and conversational.

In fact, he says that the on-stage Chris is the same as the chatty Scouser I meet.

“Because of having to get shown up on stage, the start of my gigs has always had to be dealing with the eyesight. You can’t go from dealing with that into a fake persona or a character or a crazy guy. You’ve already engaged the room in dialogue and so you’re stuck as yourself, you don’t have as much freedom to deviate. That’s why I’ve never tried to do the surreal or manic thing [he says doing an impression of the comedian Lee Evans].”

It was 2005 before McCausland could afford to pack in his job at the

call centre and become a fulltime comedian. By then, the job had become “monkey work” but he has no regrets about doing the job in the first place because it got him off benefits and gave him more of a social life. He worked close to home which left him time in the evening to do gigs.

So how does he deal with the inability to spot someone in the crowd to pick on to get a laugh?

“It’s no different for me than for any other comedian. If I turn up to go on

The start of my gigs has always had to be dealing with the eyesight. You can’t go from dealing with that into a fake persona or a character or a crazy

at the end of a gig, the guy compèring the show will say there’s a group on the right from such and such a firm, there’s some guys on the left from India on holiday having loads of fun and some Star Trek fans in the front.”

But he won’t pick on anyone “unless someone is being disruptive or too noisy”. Even then, it’s all done in “good spirits”.

“I had a pissed old Irish woman who was getting involved a little bit too much and it was getting disruptive. She was loud and she had this drunken Irish laugh. She was there because one of her kids was getting married and they were all on a night out for the engagement. I said ‘I can’t see you but I’m guessing you’re the drunk Irish woman. There can only be one person in the room with a laugh like that!’ Everyone laughed and I said ‘I’m guessing the only reason your kid’s getting married is not because they’re in love, they just want to move out of the house!’”

McCausland doesn’t like sitting down while performing and prefers to “move and gesticulate”. But he uses a stool as an orientation aid.

“I used to find that half of my brain was trying to track where I’d moved to make sure I hadn’t drifted or turned. Obviously that takes away from your brain working on the gig. Two years in, I realised that using a stool would help so I have a bar stool up there which means I can move around and then go and perch on the stool. Even if it’s just for fifteen seconds, it looks relaxed and composed, but really what it does is that it allows me to know I’m back in the centre of the stage and that the mic stand is on my left.”

As someone who is “proud” to be blazing a trail as a blind stand-up, I wonder if McCausland can put his finger on the reason for the lack of blind comedians on the stand-up circuit.

“I’d imagine that anybody who has given it a go has really really milked the blind thing. It’s also very very hard work in terms of the amount of time you’ve got to put into it and the travelling is a nightmare. I had to do four or five gigs a week for two years before I was able to give up my day job.”

McCausland has just won a talent

competition organised by Channel 4 and the Cultural Diversity Network and will perform to programme makers at an awards ceremony at the end of November to recognise the promotion of diversity issues in the TV industry.

Lenny Henry, who was one of the judges of the talent competition, praised McCausland as a comedian who is "hugely confident, talked about a disability incredibly charmingly but then quickly moved on to talk about race, relationships, gender and all manner of subjects with great spot-on writing."

It's a "great opportunity to showcase my comedy" but given his reluctance to be defined by his blindness, does he feel that winning a diversity competition will compromise him?

"Not really, no. The way I look at it is



JAMIE TROUNCE

that there's a difference between disability and ethnicity. Your ethnicity is your culture and you can be proud of your culture, your roots and where you're from. Blindness is a hindrance and not something you're proud of. You can be proud of achieving something despite being blind, but you're not proud of being blind."

Already well-known to parents and

children as Rudi the market trader from the CBeebies programme *Me Too*, McCausland is optimistic that he could be in the running for more mainstream TV exposure on game shows like *8 Out of 10 Cats* and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* "in the near future".

"I love doing the stand-up gigs and I'd love to have people buying tickets to see me doing comedy. One TV appearance will put more bums on seats than three years of gigging. So I see TV as a means to an end."

He's writing a radio comedy and has just pitched an idea to a TV company for a programme which combines his interests in comedy and science fiction.

"I've got to write another show for Edinburgh next year. I'd like to have forty five or fifty minutes of new stuff by February." ■

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the great government take-away

With the coalition Government's spending cuts being branded an attack on disabled people, **Paul Carter** looks at the implications and reactions to two of the Government's major decisions

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, took to his feet to deliver the results of the coalition Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, most people in the country were bracing themselves for swingeing cuts to public spending and services.

However, it was to emerge that disabled people were to be particularly hit by measures in the Review.

Two announcements especially caused particular consternation, the first of which was the announcement that the length of time within which people placed in the "work-related activity group" can claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is to be limited to one year.

This effectively means that from 2012/13 when the changes will be implemented, disabled people deemed fit to work but who have not found

employment within one year will see their benefit stopped.

It should be noted that people in the "support group", who are not required to seek work, will not be affected by the change.

One of our clients received zero points and was told to go back to work, but within weeks they were diagnosed with terminal cancer with only weeks to live

Neil Coyle is Director of Policy at Disability Alliance, which works to relieve the poverty and improve the living standards of disabled people.

He says that the time limit on ESA announced in the spending review presents a very real risk of actually increasing disability poverty.

"Cutting disabled people off ESA after one year despite a lack of employment opportunities and reduced support to get jobs will impoverish thousands of disabled people and their families," he says.

"This cut will additionally affect many of the 360,000 disabled people no longer able to access essential DLA and the combined effect will mean some disabled people are cut adrift from the entire welfare state."

However, fundamental concerns remain about the test itself being used to decide whether people are indeed "fit to work".

Known as the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), the test has been widely criticised for its limited scope, inflexible nature, and irrelevant questions.

The test will be used nationally from April 2011 as part of a process of moving all existing claimants of

Incapacity Benefit onto Employment and Support Allowance or Job Seeker's Allowance.

However, since October, pilots of the reassessment programme have been running in Aberdeen and Burnley.

So far, feedback from disabled people and groups representing them in those areas has been less than encouraging.

Rhona Kemp, chairwoman of Aberdeenshire Disability Action said that in the feedback from people who had already undergone the assessments was a feeling that the questions were biased towards the answers the assessors wanted.

"I have not been personally involved so what I am getting is second-hand but when there is a consistency of response some credibility must be given to what is being said.

"The other thing a lot of people have said is that there is no flexibility - you have to pick a box even if you don't think any of them are relevant to the answer you want to give. Several have also said the ones asking the questions didn't seem to have any medical knowledge."

She added that the majority of people were, perhaps understandably, reluctant to speak out publicly.

Susan McPhee, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Scotland said: "We are still seeing case after case across Scotland where people are being found fit for work even though their illness or disability restricts them from any type of work."

The picture coming from Burnley sounded equally pessimistic. A spokesman from the Burnley CAB said that he didn't believe the WCA was fit for purpose.

"It doesn't assess people in the reality of work," he said.

"One of our clients received zero



From top to bottom: Anne Begg, Neil Coyle and Jane Campbell

points and was told to go back to work, but within weeks they were diagnosed with terminal cancer with only weeks to live.

After pressure from charities and disability organisations, the Government has commissioned a review of the Work Capability Assessment, led by Professor Malcolm Harrington, which is due to report before the end of the year.

However, Anne Begg, MP for Aberdeen and herself a wheelchair-user, has expressed reservations about whether the review will come soon enough.

"I'm looking forward to seeing the report by Professor Harrington. However, there is concern that by the time he reports, whether at the end of this month or the beginning of next month, the trial in Aberdeen and Burnley will be coming to an end, and there will not be a lot of time to change things.

"There might be time to change the procedure, but not to put in place any major changes in how the work capability assessments are carried out before the full roll-out begins next year. The volumes will be quite large and it will be interesting to find out, in Aberdeen in particular, whether Atos Healthcare can manage the volumes that will be coming through. It is a big process, but there are still some fundamental flaws in how the Work Capability Assessment is in operation."

Another area of change in the Comprehensive Spending Review that has caused considerable anger among disabled people has been the decision to remove the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance from people who live permanently in residential care.

The Government claims that this decision is based on two factors.



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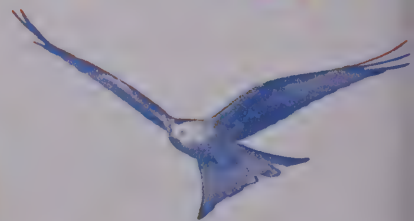
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United Kingdom Disabled People's Council (pictured), said he was "alarmed" at the impact that the cut may have on those living in residential care.

He said: "Our concerns are that through the result of losing independent mobility, that disabled people will lose the spontaneity to travel and organise their lives and will become dependent on group based travel organised by residential care homes. This echoes the institutional practices of the 1980s."

The DLA mobility element cut also raises questions of what will happen to people who are in the middle of Motability agreements, in which the mobility element of DLA is used to pay for a vehicle.

At the time *Disability Now* went to press, there was no further information on what would happen to those people and their vehicles, with Motability only confirming that the organisation would "consider in the coming weeks how the Scheme will manage the relatively small number of its customers affected by the new arrangements."

Helen Dolphin, Director of Policy and Campaigns at Mobilise, and a *Disability Now* columnist said that the DLA cut was likely to "impose further isolation on vulnerable people."

It will be many months, if not years, before the true impact upon disabled people of these cuts will be fully felt. The final word on the potential impact falls to Baroness Campbell.

"The big fair society can be achieved only if support structures are there to enable disabled people to play their part," she says.

"Otherwise, we will go back to a time when most disabled people were caught in a culture of dependency, with no alternative but to beg for charity or to be jolly grateful for what they got. This fills me with dread." ■

"Thirdly, it is based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of modern residential care and the potential of disabled people living there.

"Fourthly, it is incompatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities."

Baroness Campbell added that if the Government believed that people living in care homes are full citizens, then it should expect and want them to exercise their human and civil rights and to contribute to civil society like everyone else.

It is based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of modern residential care and the potential of disabled people living there

"Residential care homes are no longer, or should not be, places to hide people away in or to deny them opportunities the rest of us take for granted: independence, choice, access to public life and maybe, for those who can, eventually the possibility of work and independence," she said.

"Residential care homes are not intended to be prisons. We all enjoy activities outside our homes. It should be no different for those living in residential care."

Jaspal Dhani, Chief Executive of the

Firstly, that it will bring people into residential care in line with people in hospital for long periods, who currently stop receiving DLA after four weeks. Secondly, the Government have stated that DLA paid to people in residential care is often duplicated in money paid in care packages.

However, the move has caused outrage among disabled people, campaigners and politicians, who believe that the logic in removing the DLA mobility component is not only cruel, but fundamentally flawed.

Opponents point out that those who are in hospital for more than four weeks are likely to be unwell, and therefore less likely to need a mobility component, which is patently not the case for many people living in care homes.

It has been highlighted that many care home residents use their mobility payments to fund things beyond the reach of their care packages, such as scooters, taxis, or even their own vehicles, providing greater independence and in turn less reliance on the state.

One of the biggest critics has been Baroness [Jane] Campbell, who called the move "fundamentally flawed".

In a passionate speech to the House of Lords, she urged the Government to think again.

She said: "First, it will have negative and costly effects on disabled people's health and well-being, their ability to develop social and community networks and their capacity to move on from residential care to be, as the Government want, independent, participating citizens, not dependants.

"Secondly, it conflicts with the Government's policies for personalisation, independent living and encouraging disabled people to gain or retain employment.

yourviews

Save our specialist schools!

In the October issue of *Disability Now*, your "one2watch" Dan Daw states that if he was Prime Minister he would abolish "separatist" special schools, and even special education in mainstream schools. This is reflective of a prevailing view among a number of disabled people that is as baffling as it is damaging.

I have Asperger's Syndrome and up to the age of 16, I was educated entirely in mainstream schools. Throughout my education, fellow pupils bullied me because of my differences and teachers ignored my differing needs.

Even after formal diagnosis, my time at secondary school was spent having to deal with the negative attitudes of staff and pupils. At one point I was even barred from going on a school trip because my presence was termed a health and safety risk.

My experiences made me feel like a stranger in the world and increased the sense of social isolation inherent in my condition.

Then, at 16, I began three years in the special needs section of a nearby sixth-form college. It was a life-changing experience. At last I had found somewhere I

belonged, surrounded by disabled people (most with very different conditions to my own) and sympathetic and understanding staff who were universally positive and enthusiastic about people with disabilities.

I felt more comfortable with people there than I have felt my entire life. It was there that my feeling of solidarity with my disabled brothers and sisters first took hold. And yet it is precisely this sort of environment that would be abolished if some sadly misguided disabled activists had their way.

I am a mentally high-functioning person without physical impairment. If I can experience prejudice and negative feeling in mainstream education, I shudder to think what a person with a severe learning disability or conspicuous physical deficiency would suffer if forced to run the gauntlet of mainstream school.

Far from Dan Daw's "curricular isolation", special education will always have a role, not only in providing a welcoming environment for all kinds of disabled people, but in the collective celebration of our differences from the general public.

As I write this, stories



LISA F. YOUNG / SHUTTERSTOCK

abound in the news about people affected by mental illness waiting three years to speak to a professional. Few people understand that the failing community mental health system is a direct consequence of the systematic destruction of dedicated mental hospitals in the later half of the 20th century.

Then, in-patients of such hospitals were pushed into isolation and largely abandoned. Now, disabled children are dumped into mainstream schools that are unable or unwilling to cater

for their needs.

Then, as now, slogans about "inclusion" and "rehabilitation" were used to mask cost-cutting closures of specialist services for the vulnerable. Then, as now, the very people who should have challenged such rhetoric and thrown their weight behind the retention of special services were the ones found opposing them most vehemently.

Save our special schools!
James M. Brierley, by email

Child Benefit cuts will do real damage

As the parent of a disabled child, I am worried about cuts to Child Benefit. I stay at home and my husband earns just over £44,000. We will therefore no longer receive child benefit. This will affect us as a family. It will also disproportionately affect parents of all disabled children, especially where one parent has to stay at home to provide childcare. What can be done to address this issue?

Rachel Bridgeman, by email

I'm an occupational therapist: trust me

I'd like to comment on Alan Bernstone's letter ("Has the Government really thought out its cuts?", *Disability Now*, October 2010) about the impact of proposed cuts in the benefits system and pressure on work capability assessors to get clients off benefits.

In my experience, occupational therapists are best qualified to complete assessments in these situations. They look at their clients holistically – physically, psychologically and socially – and at how each individual functions in different environments.

I had a back injury and was off work for six months,

but have made such a good recovery that I have decided to train as an occupational therapist myself.

**Helena D'Mello
London**

Think we're an easy target? Think again

Hundreds if not thousands of us have had letters from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announcing cuts in Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI). SMI is being reduced to the Bank of England base rate. That means I am losing £30 per week.

I called the DWP who say they have had hundreds of calls and advised me to contact my lender. When I did so, I was greeted with a recorded message telling me that they had received hundreds of calls and telling me to contact the DWP. I rang Downing Street and was told that hundreds of people have written in and was referred to the DWP's website.

The DWP website says that if you disagree with a decision, you can appeal against it and have a legal right to a written statement. I disagree with the funding cuts decision but the DWP refuses to provide a written statement. All it can say to justify this decision is: "The Treasury told us to do it."

We are caught in a policy row between the DWP and the Treasury. If we lose our homes, the Government will end up paying out more money in Housing Benefit.

Am I the only one fighting this? We're not being treated fairly because the Government think they have picked on a group with very little fight in them. Well,

I think we have a moral obligation to follow this through. I used to work as a Housing Officer but I work harder now spending all my time fighting such decisions and trying to survive. I want other people out there who are feeling scared to know that they are not alone.

Mrs Findlay Judge, by email

newsupdate

MP's blog sets web a-twitter

Guido Expose

So, Guido found email <http://order-order.com/>

Apparently, I trended on Twitter all day. Not that I have a clue what that means. Of my 80,000 constituents, I would bet I'm being generous if I say 50 of them noticed.

The left wing Twitterati have apparently gone into overdrive today, and so they should. Guido informs me that his expose claims to be a Labour activist web site organiser for Bedfordshire - or something similar, AND she writes adult entertainment - nice lady.

For the purpose of clarity, let me point out the following:

If you are genuinely disabled, or like my mum, retired and love to use the Internet to chat to friends etc (she makes me look like a luddite) then that is fantastic and I wish you many hours of pleasure.

If you Twitter all day, every day about claiming disability benefit in one tweet whilst arranging a night on the town... if you tweet about claiming six months rent from the social fund whilst...



journalists agreed. Journalists uses Twitter work and could say Nadine that we to plan t Disab Platt add alarming views lik health se which wh her a voi some as

Nadine Dorries MP: woeful and uninformed

Regarding your news story, "MP's blog sets web a-twitter" (*Disability Now*, November 2010), I can't help but think that Ms Dorries has missed the point, which is woeful, given her position in government.

"Disability benefits" (by which she presumably means Disability Living Allowance, as Employ-

ment Support Allowance is not commonly known as such) has nothing to do with the ability to work.

I find her attitude disturbing. It only goes to fuel misconceptions about disability, work and benefits, as well as adding to the disablism that we are facing every day.

**Emma Reeves,
by email**

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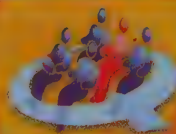
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BIG society – BIG responsibility

In implementing his “big society” ideas, David Cameron faces choices says **Andy Rickell** and it’s to our advantage that he chooses well

I believe the origin of David Cameron’s “big society” is the “Sermon on the Mound” – the speech made by Margaret Thatcher in May 1988 to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland when she said “There is no such thing as society”.

So clearly wrong is that statement in fact, and so clearly is that statement indicative of an extreme conservatism, that Cameron needed to rehabilitate the Tory party as an active supporter of collective human social action beyond the state – hence “big society”.

For the “big society” to be a really good thing, Cameron has two choices to make and he must choose both correctly, otherwise disabled people and their organisations will suffer.

The first choice is between the two models of collective voluntary activity – the charity and the community organisation. The charity is the model developed in the Victorian era – group A works together to improve the lot of group B. The traditional large disability charities are examples of this – disabled people are their beneficiaries

but it is non-disabled people who primarily lead and staff them.

The community organisation is a model often described as self-help but it is where members of a community democratically work together to benefit members of the same community. Disabled people’s organisations are examples of this – disabled people are not only the beneficiaries but also the leaders and often the providers too. “Big society” needs to champion the self-help model and challenge the charity model. A charity model is less formally accountable than the state to its beneficiaries.

The second choice is between a laissez-faire approach to the development of “big society” activity, or a pro-active support approach for “communities” with less capacity.

If a laissez-faire approach is adopted, it will be unfair and not address disadvantage. Local leadership opportunities will be grabbed by individuals in communities of place or interest who already have the resources to do so – the

wealthy, the well-connected, the articulate, those already able to get powerful positions – sometimes summed up as “the sharp-elbowed middle classes”. As we disabled people are amongst the poorest, with poor social networks, already

For the ‘big society’ to be a really good thing, Cameron has two choices to make and he must choose both correctly, otherwise disabled people and their organisations will suffer

struggling to get the support or the positions that enable our voices to be heard, we will fall further behind.

The pro-active support approach would focus on those who want to take control collectively over aspects of their lives, but

who need support to build their capacity to do so. This approach would truly empower those currently most disempowered, and that would definitely include disabled people and our collective activity. The state would need to fund such capacity building initiatives, but it would pay back multi-fold, and would have major knock-on benefits in terms of building individuals’ personal capacity and self-actualisation – what we call true “independent living”. But it needs Cameron to recognise that some state intervention is needed.

And it needs his recognition that existing disabled people’s organisations already embody the model of the “big society” that we want to replicate, so existing DPOs should also get such support, rather than be trampled on in the rush to do something new which has happened till now.

→ Have your say

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Property

KATE SHEEHAN

Occupational therapist with interest in housing

Motoring and Transport HELEN DOLPHIN

Works with Mobilise and specialises in matters to do with cars

How does the new ESA work?

Q If you are getting Incapacity Benefit now and are put onto the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and have not paid

National Insurance (NI) for many years, does this mean being put on income-based benefit? If so, is it means tested? I have been on incapacity and DLA for a

few years now and I am worried that I will lose money because I haven't made any NI contributions. I'd welcome your advice.
Suzanne Peel, by email



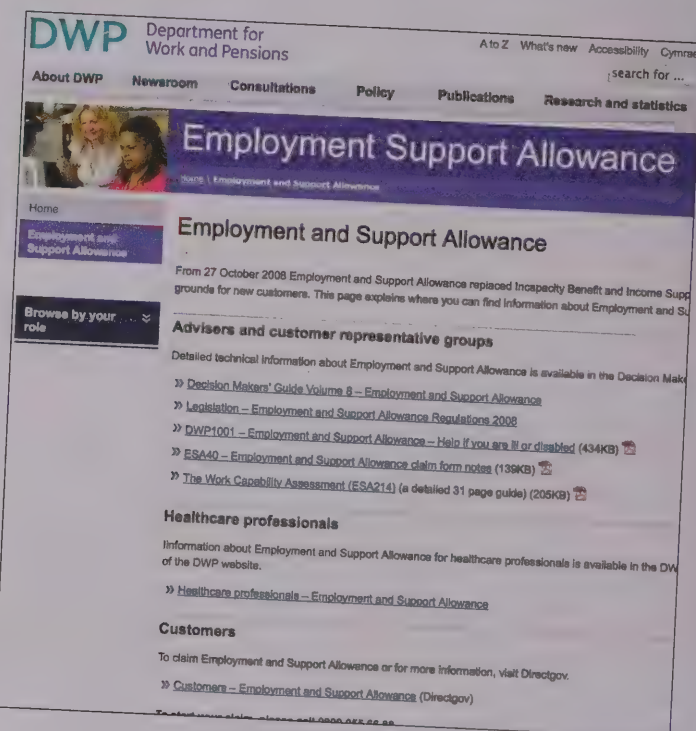
Ken Butler
from Disability Alliance says:

Between Spring 2011 and 2014, 1.5 million people who get benefit on the grounds of incapacity will be medically examined using the Work Capability Assessment.

This will check if they have a "limited capability for work" and can be transferred to ESA. If so, they will be placed either in the ESA "work-related activity group" or the ESA "support group". People in the support group are not obliged to undertake any work-related activity.

Those who get income support paid on the grounds of illness or disability will be transferred to means-tested ESA. But all those in receipt of contributory incapacity benefits will be transferred to contribution-based ESA.

If someone gets less on incapacity benefits than the appropriate ESA rate, then his or her benefit will be increased to the ESA rate. Those who receive more on existing incapacity benefits



than the appropriate ESA rate will have their existing rate of benefit frozen at the point of transfer.

In short, the fact that you haven't paid National Insurance contributions will not disbar you from being transferred to contribution-based ESA and you should not receive less than your existing rate of Incapacity Benefit.

However, on 20 October 2010, the Government

announced that entitlement to contributory ESA for those in the "work-related activity group" is to be limited to just one year. It is yet to be confirmed when this change will come into effect or what support will be available for people losing access to this support.

We at Disability Alliance will be updating our website with information as soon as we know more about this significant change.

If you have a question for our panel:

Phone us 020 7619 7323. Write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW. Email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



How can I fight council indifference?

Q I live in Yorkshire with my disabled mother and her severely disabled husband, my stepfather (86). Earlier this year his Blue Badge had to be renewed. He can only walk a few inches at a time with a walking frame and therefore doesn't leave the house. Were it not for his appointments at Dewsbury and Wakefield hospitals, he wouldn't need a Blue Badge.

My mother asked the local issuing office if she could renew the badge by sending a recent photo or if the issuing office could do this on a home visit, since Kirklees Council offers home visit services for non-disabled people who need assessments. It turned out, unbelievably, that there isn't a home visit service for disabled people

needing a disability badge.

Instead, my mother was told that her husband had to show up in person at Dewsbury town hall, and had to take his expiring disability badge in with him.

My mother therefore asked me to take him in their car, which meant she had to come with us, so that we could use her Blue Badge to park in a disabled space. (This raises a serious issue for disabled persons who have to visit the town hall while taking their badge in with them.)

When we got there, we found only two disabled parking spaces, up a side street, but none outside the disabled entrance to the town hall. (Disabled drivers used to be able to park on yellow lines by the side of the town hall, but this area is now cordoned

off while the town hall is being refurbished.)

I had no choice but to drop the two of them off outside the disabled entrance but while a helpful door attendant was getting a wheelchair, a traffic warden ticketed the car, even though the Blue Badge was showing.

People watched, stunned. Even the doorman couldn't believe it and assured me it would only be a case of ringing the necessary department to get the ticket cancelled.

In fact, there hasn't been any goodwill, whether from the parking office or subsequently from any of the numerous departments within Kirklees whose help I have sought. I have used virtually every avenue of appeal: nobody in the council is listening. Even local councillor, Vivien Lees-Hamilton, has made representations but all her protests have been met with indifference. Can anyone help?

Stewart Moxon, by email



Helen Dolphin replies:

This is a very troubling story, and I'll try to answer each of your points. First, since you say that your stepfather has difficulty walking and only uses his Blue Badge to go to the hospital,

I suggest you ask his doctor if he qualifies for hospital transport, but only do this if he really doesn't use a badge for anything else.

You ask why someone from the council cannot visit you at home when visits are made to non-disabled people for other reasons. This is probably because Blue Badges are for people to get out and about. The council therefore assumes that your stepfather is more mobile than he actually is. (But not all councils ask all Blue Badge applicants to attend an assessment.)

To have to take your disabled mother with you simply so you can park is ludicrous. The council needs to make provision for people attending appointments to be able to use their Blue Badges. I understand the need for councils to ask for expired badges to be returned but it is silly to expect people to bring their badges with them and then get a parking ticket.

I find what happened next with the traffic warden repugnant, especially if he could see you were struggling. I would like to know why he gave you a ticket and, if you have appealed, what the outcome was. If the council rejects your formal representation, you can appeal to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal, telephone: 0161 242 5252. Good luck.



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Staying home: cuts hit those in care



The decision to scrap the mobility component of DLA for people in residential care not only ignores needs, says **Peter White**, but flies in the face of reality

Joe Coffin uses the mobility component of his Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in many ways: to get to his further education class, go shopping on his own, or meet friends for the odd drink.

Sometimes the care home where he lives lets him use its minibus, paid for partly by part of Joe's and other residents' DLA. When the bus isn't available, Joe may get a taxi, but he's also confident enough to use public transport.

Deaf and blind, Joe does have some hearing but some of his friends are both totally blind and profoundly deaf, and going on public transport without someone to accompany them is a pretty tough challenge.

You'd have thought that if anyone was entitled to a benefit meant to help people preserve some independence by funding their own travel, it would be Joe and his friends. And yet the Government has decided to withdraw the payment of the mobility component of DLA for people in residential care, to bring them in line with people in hospital

who don't receive it. We're still waiting for more details of welfare reform but the thrust was clear in George Osborne's Comprehensive Spending Review speech.

It's an interesting move, putting care homes on a par with hospitals, because it suggests that all the talk of "independence" and "self-determination" will count for nothing in the current climate of scythe-swinging.

It may be a good moment

to remind Messrs Osborne, Duncan-Smith, et al, that it was their party, under a Mrs Thatcher, that introduced the policy of community care, to try and get people out of institutions wherever possible.

When questioned on this, the Government says that "assessed care needs should be met by local authorities' contracts with care homes", and refers to the two billion they say they're putting into social care. The problem is, this money isn't ring-fenced; in any case, getting money to meet your "assessed needs" is a million miles

from exercising control over your own money.

By making residential care equate to hospitals, the Government is implying that there's been "double-accounting": that they've been paying for people's care twice. They seem oblivious to the fact that people like Joe are contributing part of their mobility allowance to residential homes to fund their travel needs. It's hardly surprising, when people see these kind of decisions, that they ask where on earth we're going. It feels like backwards!

Old English proverb: give a novice a scythe, and innocent bystanders like Joe Coffin beware!



guestcolumn

Double whammy

People with physical impairments and users of mental health services may each be receiving increased attention, but in a recent study **Julia Smith** has examined whether mental health services in the UK are currently meeting the needs of individuals who fall into both categories

While working as a social worker in an adults' physical disability team over the last ten years, I became increasingly aware of the lack of services available to people with physical impairments and mental health problems.

This led me to examine the personal experiences of 12 women with physical impairments who had also used mental health services. From the study, several themes emerged and several areas were highlighted in which such services might be enhanced in the future.

The study showed how most women had found it hard to access appropriate information and had come up against structural barriers, especially before implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act. Women who waited up to a year for support or a needs assessment spoke of feeling frustrated and let down by services.

While women said that

their general practitioner had helped them get access to services, three quarters also described their GP's response as "poor". Many women felt GPs prescribed medication too readily and thought consultations were too short.

Most women who used mental health support were disappointed at what they saw as a lack of awareness and understanding of disability by the professionals they came in contact with. Routinely, professionals tended to assume that the mental health difficulties women were experiencing were linked directly to their physical impairment.

Women stressed the importance of professionals recognising the potential effect of inaccessible environments and attitudes towards disability on mental health in the long term. But all women also recognised that improvements in attitudes towards disability, and improved access to the environment over recent decades, had had a good

effect on their mental well-being.

Women welcomed the opportunities now available for social contact with others, thus reducing what, for some, had been several years of enforced social isolation. But most felt they hadn't had enough contact time with the service or professional they needed. Disappointingly, only two women recalled positive experiences of working with mental health professionals. This had occurred where professionals were prepared to listen to the woman's own perceptions of her difficulties and the factors she believed were contributing to it.

There were mixed reports of using statutory services but more positive reports of using the voluntary sector. Respondents valued the availability of support groups for the opportunity they gave to talk to others who were experiencing similar difficulties.

Women with experience of acute mental distress likewise emphasised the vital role played by groups such as the Samaritans. They expressed concern, however, that recent

increases in the demands on voluntary services were limiting the flexibility they had previously provided.

Women also wished to see a reduction in waiting times for support. Long waits had harmed their confidence in services. They also thought that working with one dedicated professional rather than a pool would produce better outcomes, as would more flexible responses to different mental health difficulties and the severity of distress.

Recent years have seen

Most women who used mental health support were disappointed by the professionals they came in contact with

increased recognition of the mental health support needs of different groups of women, but this has not been so for women who also have physical impairments. The time has come for this to change.

• This is an edited summary. The full text can be read at leeds.ac.uk/disabilityarchive

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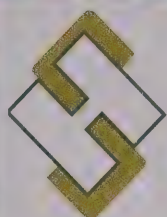
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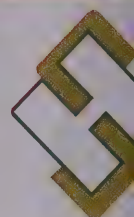
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Sussex Health Care is an award winning group of care homes that were founded in 1985. Sussex Health Care now operates 16 care homes, predominantly in the West Sussex area, providing nearly 550 beds, incorporating specialist care provision including care for older people.

Orchard Lodge, Dorking Road, Warnham, West Sussex RH12 3RZ

Orchard Lodge, just outside Horsham, West Sussex, provides care for adults with learning and physical disabilities. This specialist care home with nursing combines the latest technological facilities with a safe and comfortable environment. Activity rooms are available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms. Hydrotherapy services are available in the swimming pool and spa with multi-purpose rooms for structured activities.

Wisteria Lodge, Horney Common, Nutley, East Sussex TN22 3EA

Wisteria Lodge in Nutley, East Sussex, caters for young people with physical and learning disabilities. The home offers superb purpose-built facilities with track hoisting throughout. Each single room provides en suite facilities. A spa pool is available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms.

STOP PRESS

Opening in Spring 2010, we have two new services for young adults with learning and physical disabilities. The new 10-bedded purpose-built units will be at Orchard Lodge, Warnham, near Horsham RH12 3RZ and Wisteria Lodge, Horney Common, Nutley TN22 3EA

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- NORFOLK LODGE (Learning Disabilities) Horsham 01403 218876
- ORCHARD LODGE (Physical & Learning Disabilities) Warnham 01403 242278
- RAPKYNs CARE HOME (Adult Care & Neurological Conditions) Horsham 01403 265096
- RAPKYNs CARE CENTRE (Physical & Learning Disabilities), Horsham 01403 276756
- WHITE LODGE (Learning Disabilities) Purley, Croydon 020 8763 2586
- WISTERIA LODGE (Physical & Learning Disabilities) Nutley, Nr. Uckfield 01825 714080

For further information or to arrange a visit, please contact Corrine Wallace, Head of Operational Care Services Tel: 01403 217338 • Fax: 01403 219842 email: corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.co.uk www.sussexhealthcare.co.uk



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



obituary



"Bionic carrot" with a big heart

Chair of RADAR and long-time disability activist **Phil Friend** pays tribute to sportsman, photographer and friend Graham Bool

Photographer, sportsman, father, partner and friend, Graham Bool died suddenly at home on 17 September 2010. His memorial service held on 5 October was attended by over 350 people.

Born in Wales in 1948, Graham contracted polio at the age of 18 months and as a result had a lifelong mobility impairment.

His early education, like so many others of his generation, took place in a special boarding school in Surrey. At around the age of 14, after a considerable struggle, his mother managed

to get him transferred to a local secondary school in Westminster, where he completed his education.

Graham's first job was in the Civil Service (mainly licking envelopes!). Not content with this role he found work with Agfa-Gevaert, a photographic company, and very quickly became the manager of their Piccadilly branch. It was here that he really developed his love for photography and where he acquired his technical skills and detailed knowledge.

Graham married Frances in the late 1970s and had two children, Jessica and Roger,

and they made their home in Great Saling, Essex. Graham and Fran became popular and valued members of the community. This was reflected in the kindness and support he and his children received when Fran died of cancer in 1993.

Aside from his children, Graham's legacy primarily relates to disability sport, first as a competitor in wheelchair basketball in the UK. He played for the South London Aces, London Hawks and Lodge Moor during the 1960s and 70s. He was selected to play for Great Britain at the Paralympics in Heidelberg in 1972 and

Toronto in 1976. During the Toronto Games he was nicknamed the "Bionic Carrot" because of his bright ginger hair and limitless enthusiasm and energy.

Once his playing career ended he focused on his freelance career and soon found ways of combining his love of disabled sport with photography. He was commissioned by *Disability Now* to provide pictures from sporting events as well as exhibitions including NAIDEX and the Mobility Roadshow. He was also a judge for the magazine's photographic competitions. He became a fixture at major disability sports events across the UK, everything from the London Marathon to wheelchair table tennis. He covered every Paralympic Games from Barcelona 1992 to Beijing 2008.

Graham was a big man, with a big smile, a big handshake, a big moustache and a very big heart. He loved people and had boundless energy and enthusiasm for life. He had a photographic memory and a wonderful sense of humour and it was impossible to be with him without laughing.

He helped to put disabled sport on the map and along the way was an inspirational figure for many aspiring disabled athletes. He leaves behind a very big hole but some wonderful memories.

Fickle

fashion's crip craze



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY HANDAN EREK



It seems that the latest must-have accessory for Autumn/Winter 2010 is a disabled model with fashion shows full of disabled models springing up left, right and slightly off-centre. But, asks **Lara Masters**, is this a trend that's got legs, wheels or crutches or is it just a flash in the fashion pan

I recently wrote about Models of Diversity's all-inclusive catwalk show which felt a tad amateur and left me wondering if disabled models would ever be taken seriously. Since then, venerable tie-fetishist Jon Snow has compèred "Disabled and Sexy" – a fashion show with disabled models in London's Notting Hill – because he believes: "The whole fashion industry has a role to play in ensuring disabled people are more visible and have the same opportunities as everyone else." And HAFAD (Hammersmith and Fulham Action on Disability) fronted "Fashion with Passion" which boasted a mix of disabled and able-bodied models and designers including some big names.

I approach disability-fashion hybrid endeavours with slight trepidation because I'm not one to put a positive spin on things because they happen to have disabled people involved.



Disability is no excuse for mediocrity, and when it comes to modelling – blind, deaf, one leg or two heads – you've either got it, or you haven't.

It's important that disabled models are convincing and competent so they'll be employed in the frankly fascistic fashion industry but it's more vital that they become beacons for other disabled people who may be struggling with their self-image.

Ex-model agent Jonathan Phang, who worked as the disabled models' mentor in *Britain's Missing Top Model*

says: "We need to look beyond stereotypes. Not only to encourage the fashion world to change their thinking, but to help raise a deeper understanding about the prejudices young, beautiful disabled women have to overcome every day."

Jonathan is backing a charter launched by disabled stylist Tess Daly who organised "Disabled and Sexy" with the Jennifer Trust for Spinal Muscular Atrophy. Tess says: "I wanted this fashion show to prove that people with even the most severe disability can follow fashion, display individuality and have sex appeal. We aim to keep pushing the boundaries that have been put upon people with disabilities within the fashion industry with the help of this charter."

The manifesto calls for measurable change in the fashion industry including urging high street retailers to follow Debenhams' lead in using

disabled models in their advertising, for disabled models to be used in major clothing catalogues like Littlewoods and Next Directory and for a disabled model to be featured on the front cover of *Vogue* within a year.

If it sounds ambitious it's perhaps because as disabled people, we're used to being side-lined and having doors slammed in our face – often quite literally – but with these recent attempts to marry disability and the fickle world of fashion, and the interest the subject is receiving from influential figures, that charter now seems achievable.

I attended HAFAD's "Fashion with Passion" which was organised by wheelchair-user Zubeen Kibris to "make more retail chains and designers aware of the 'wheel pound'". It featured a proper catwalk in Hammersmith and



West London College refectory and some impressively confident, well-choreographed models with disabilities including wheelchair-user Jordan Bone and Ramona Williams who's blind (pictured with Temisan Williams brother of Ortise out of JLS!).

TV stars Kelly-Marie Stewart from *Hollyoaks* and former-*EastEnders* and wheelchair-user David Proud also worked the catwalk in collections from mainstream designers including John Smedley, Fullcircle and ASOS.com as well as disabled designers WheeliChix-Chic and GlamSticks.

It feels like change is actually happening and it's not just lip-service; Debenhams has used an obviously

disabled model in their advertising campaigns, the nation's favourite newsreader worked alongside the disabled models at "Disabled and Sexy" and HAFAD got the support of big brands and celebs.

However, delectable Shannon Murray comments: "At the moment I don't know if I'll be doing more with Debenhams, fashion moves fast and what was "in" last season may not be "in" next season. While it's an achievement to appear in a high street store campaign and have more disabled actors appear in prime-time soaps, while disabled people are being bullied and victimised in their own homes there is still a long way to go..."

Only time will tell if this is all just a phase or the first step/wheel into a new era for disability representation. ■

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Iran

Persian paradise

Beyond the political cauldron which is how Tehran, capital of Iran can all too easily look to western eyes, **Marion Bull** found the tomb of a poet, philosopher and mathematician, some surprising desert architecture and the peace of this truly ancient civilisation

We drove through a blizzard of husks from newly opened leaves on the streets of Yazd. They stuck to the windscreen and settled on buildings and pavements. They rose and fell in swirls around black chadors as women swished past, hurrying to the Persian Nowruz. This is the New Year celebration, a Spring equinox festivity that goes back some 3,000 years.

You can fly from Tehran of course, but I decided to cross two deserts to see all the fabled cities strung round them like a necklace; Isfahan, Kashan, Kerman, Shiraz, and Persepolis. Yazd sits right in the middle, surrounded by desert. It's the hottest place and the one with the most unusual architecture. Windcatchers, ancient ventilation systems, rise from the city like chimneys to trap cool air in the houses.

Marco Polo noted that it was a good seven days' ride to the next city, Kerman, but we did it in an afternoon, with a glimpse of travel from a time when this road formed part of the Silk Route. Caravanserais – medieval inns, where travellers would stay overnight and exchange one knackered horse for another, and mud-brick villages appear mid-desert, to a mountainous backdrop.

So did a thunderbolt, or so it seemed. Something huge hit the windscreen with such force that I leapt back in the seat and my headscarf fell off. The driver didn't even flinch. "It's only a burst tyre from the lorry in front," he observed. We swerved in a dust cloud to avoid a dead camel. The Dasht-e Lut is not one of those quiet, uneventful deserts. The main route to the Persian Gulf runs through it. I adjusted the headscarf.

You can find peace and quiet in Persian gardens though. All have water features. One of the most beautiful, the 16th century Fin Palace near the



city of Kashan, further south from Kerman, opens on to a walled enclosure with turquoise tiled water channels flanked by cypress trees. Fountains fed by a natural spring lead to arched ceilings exquisitely painted with flowers and birds. But a dark secret lurks here: Amir Kabir, the chancellor, was murdered in his bath by the king's assassin in 1852.

After two weeks around the desert

Did you know?

Omar Khayyam was also a mathematician and astronomer. He revised the solar calendar with such accuracy that it was considered better than the Gregorian one invented 500 years later.

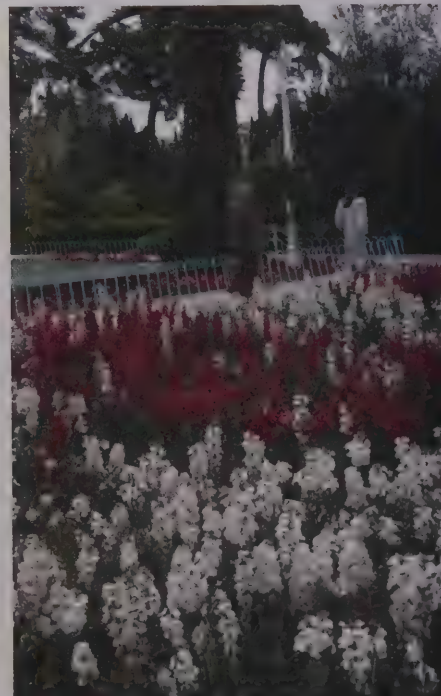
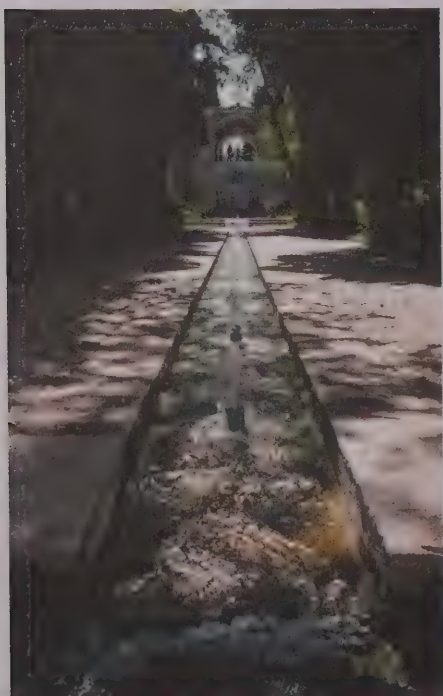
towns, I left the hired driver in Tehran, and took a flight to the holy city of Mashhad near the Turkmenistan/Afghan border. In the market, you can find everything from fist-sized chunks of turquoise, still embedded in rock, to a concoction of honey, ground hazelnuts, yoghurt, dates, and other dried fruits all whisked together to form an exotic dessert. But no time to bargain for the turquoise – I'd come to visit the birthplace and tomb of 11th century poet and philosopher, Omar Khayyam in the small town of Nishapur.

As elsewhere in Iran, the ceiling in the Mashhad hotel room had a wooden arrow nailed to it, pointing towards Mecca. Just as I was musing on this it suddenly disappeared in a cloud of



Did you know?

The word "paradise" comes from the Persian word for garden.





smoke that crept across from an air vent. An acquired total hearing loss can bring unforeseen claustrophobia. The fear of getting in a lift on my own wasn't helped by having to stay on the 8th floor. No chance of using a phone, either. I rushed down 16 flights of stairs to a young receptionist who had previously refused to go up in the lift with me, a lone foreign female (so I walked up with my bags, glad that I hadn't bought that lump of turquoise). But now he hesitated to go up to my room. Eventually he found someone suitable enough to investigate; an elderly commissionaire in an extravagant uniform who was having trouble getting his gold braided epaulettes through the doorway, never mind up the stairs. All the while I was jumping up and down yelling, "FIRE!" Everybody else seemed calm.

By the time we arrived on the 8th floor the drama was over. Most of the smoke had gone. "Kitchen. Haha! Chicken!" he laughed, pointing upwards. Perhaps it was a regular occurrence. Perhaps the kitchen was on the roof. It was only then that I noticed the full extent of his hat. It

Did you know?

It's estimated that only 7% of turquoise jewellery on the world's markets is natural. Most turquoise is dyed or mixed with resin to give it its typical colour. The best quality natural turquoise comes from the mines near Nishapur.

was about 2ft across. The only proof I had that any of this had happened at all was a bag full of clothes that smelt of kebabs for the rest of the trip.

But Nishapur was indeed peaceful. Wispy green shoots were just appearing on trees. Several celebrated figures are buried here in gardens with extraordinary symbolic memorials. Omar Khayyam's modern tomb, in a shaded garden near the original site is an elongated dome with star-shaped gaps at the top, so you can see the sky through it ("this inverted bowl we call the sky"). Inscriptions from his poetry decorate the exterior. A local man stood reading them for me, trying to interpret them into simple English. They were immediately recognisable, despite Edward FitzGerald's 19th

century translation criticised for being too free with the original text.

To look for vestiges of the potter's shop which featured so highly in Omar's poem *The Rubaiyat* was romantic at best – it was 900 years since he had written about it. To actually find anything at all was a personal pilgrimage achieved. In a former caravanserai in the middle of the town, niches concealed various traders at work. One of them, a baker, was stretching flat bread over a hot stone, and using a primitive wood-fired oven. Some things never change. Nearby, in a small museum, a couple of pots lay casually against a wall in the afternoon sun ("the clay population...round in rows").

I asked the curator about them. He told me that these pots would have been 1,000 years old when Omar was alive. He may well have been inspired by them.

It had taken me years to get here. Wars, fatwas, revolutions intervened, and all the bureaucracy that makes a place more intriguing. Iran seems to close in on itself at times, and it isn't the easiest place to get around independently, but thunderbolts aside, it was worth the wait.

INFORMATION

Accessible personalised tours to Iran:

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Note: Women should wear head covering (not face covering) and loose, full-length plain clothing. Men should dress modestly. No shorts, T-shirts or sleeveless tops.



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Wheelchairs with Knobz on

How often do you hear a powered wheelchair user say "I've lost my knob"? For clarification, the knob is the bit of wood or plastic that goes at the end of the wheelchair's joystick and I've been losing mine ever since I was at school.



Until now, I've never seen a knob as a fashion statement but I've just been trying and testing eight new designs by Meru, a charity that makes what it calls "life-changing products for young disabled people", and I'm changing my mind, although as a 27-year-old man, I may be sliding out of the target market for this product.

The new designs, called "Knobz" with a z, allow a wheelchair user to drive a chair with style and panache. Aesthetically, I found the skull and the grenade the coolest, and the heart and glittery ones a bit girly. I'm not sure I'd

How can an electric wheelchair say something about your personality? Power-chair user **Martyn Sibley** checks out one possible solution



feel comfortable using any of them manoeuvring around the office, but who knows on a night out?

I did encounter a problem attaching them to the joystick but once my PA had

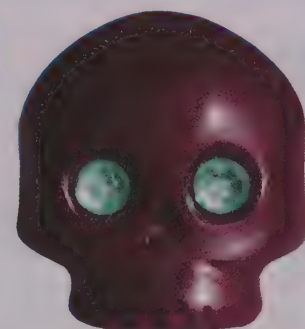


helped me, I was able to roam around with each of the Knobz to see how they fared. In practical terms, the skull and the handle style were the easiest to grip.

The key is feeling comfortable when bumping over rough terrain or driving for a long time. A knob has to be the right shape in the hand. I'm sure the style and usability will vary person to person, but I think the idea is a winner.

I even suggested Tim Westwood do something like this, years ago on MTV.

The only issue, for me as



an older man, is the styling. Ten years ago, I'd definitely have used a couple of the Knobz. Today, I'd want something designed for a more adult audience.

I might feel happier, for example, with a simple design, branded with my favourite band or football team. I could even have an office knob, a football knob, a music knob and a glow-in-the-dark knob. Should my knob fall off in a dark corner, I could find it easily and put it back on.

There could even be a knob that opens bottles. The options are endless.

Who wouldn't want to pimp their ride?



INFORMATION

Meru is at Unit 2, Eclipse Estate, 30 West Hill, Epsom, Surrey KT19 8JD.

Phone: 01372 725203

Email: info@meru.org.uk

Website: meru.org.uk

helen dolphin

Scots bill to scotch pavement parking



It's the bane of many disabled people's lives: parking on the pavement or obscuring dropped kerbs and, says **Helen Dolphin**, Scotland is now looking to follow England in banning it

I'm sure many wheelchair-users would have encountered the irritating problem of needing to cross the road but finding the only dropped kerb within sight has a vehicle parked across it. If I'm walking I can use the vehicle to help me walk down the kerb by performing a vaguely acrobatic manoeuvre but if I'm in my wheelchair all I can do is wheel off down the road looking for the next dropped kerb to cross.

Although this is an annoying irritation, what I find even more inconvenient is drivers who park on the pavement and don't leave enough space for me to get past. This means I have to double back, leave the comparative safety of the pavement to go on the road, pass the car and then get back on the pavement at the next dropped kerb (sometimes a fair distance away). This is not only a waste of time but



also incredibly dangerous.

And not just for me. For years now the National Federation of the Blind has been running a campaign under the banner "Give us back our pavements" objecting against just this sort of thoughtless behaviour. Giving your shins a crack on the bumper of a car which you didn't see was there is only slightly more preferable to having to step out into the unknown danger of a busy road.

Rule 243 of the Highway Code clearly states: "Do not stop or park where the kerb has been lowered to help wheelchair-users and powered mobility vehicles." Rule 244 also states: "You must not park partially or wholly on the pavement in London, and should not do so elsewhere unless signs permit it." In addition to this, from 1 June 2009 all councils in England and Wales were granted powers to introduce blanket Special Enforcement Areas covering vehicles that park on dropped kerbs or double-park, without a requirement to provide road signs or markings. As parking alongside a dropped kerb is considered to be a higher level offence any drivers caught doing so would be issued with a penalty fine of £120 in London and £70 outside

(pre-discounted rate).

These powers currently don't exist in Scotland but Ross Finnie MSP is keen to bring in a similar bill. The bill will seek to encourage local authorities across Scotland to put in place "no parking" restrictions at dropped kerbs or on pavements. The campaign group Inverclyde Council on Disability (ICOD) is strongly in favour of a bill being introduced as wheelchair-users in the group have found their mobility unnecessarily restricted by motor vehicles.

Rule 243 of the Highway Code clearly states: "Do not stop or park where the kerb has been lowered to help wheelchair-users and powered mobility vehicles"

However, Andrew Howard, Head of Road Safety at the AA is not in favour. He said: "The AA opposed this rule when it was introduced in England and Wales and we still don't agree that local

authorities should have carte-blanche to enforce this rule without giving motorists any warning. Taken to extremes, householders or businesses could get their own cars ticketed whilst they are legitimately parked alongside the dropped kerb outside – not causing any nuisance or obstruction to anyone but themselves."

I can't say where I live that these new powers have made much difference as there's still lots of cars parked on the pavement getting in my way.

However, I still believe it is better to have these powers in place than not at all and so I hope the Scottish bill is successfully passed. Maybe in the future motorists will realise the error of their ways – especially with the help of a few parking tickets – and travel along the pavements will be considerably easier for people with disabilities.

Responses to the consultation on the Scottish bill need to be submitted by 31 January 2011. Find out more by visiting <http://tiny.cc/Kerbparking>



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sportnow

By Paul Carter



Weir wins first Big Apple prize

British wheelchair racer David Weir has claimed his first ever victory in the New York marathon after storming to victory in an emphatic finish in Central Park.

The six-time Paralympic medallist defeated Masazumi Soejima of Japan in a blistering sprint finish over the final 200m, winning the race in a time of 1:37.29.

The delight was apparent for the 31-year-old, who has missed the last three New York marathons because of injury or illness.

Weir, who is still getting accustomed to a new racing chair, found himself slightly

behind in the opening stages of the race, with Australian Kurt Fearnley, traditionally one of Weir's main rivals, taking hold at the front.

Josh Cassidy, who pipped Weir to the London marathon title back in April, briefly picked up the lead before the 31-year-old took up position at the front of the leading pack.

At 18-miles, an unexpectedly jaded Fearnley struggled to match the pace of Weir and Soejima and the pair broke away to set up a thrilling finish.

With both racers wheel to wheel over the final stages,

Weir's trademark sprint power proved enough for him to edge out the race.

Weir said: "I knew Soejima is a good coaster downhill, so I knew I'd have to wait and wait and wait."

"My arms were so heavy, I didn't think I'd get to the finish line."

Fearnley admitted he was disappointed not to be able to pick up his fifth straight New York title.

"It was just a tough day and tough days don't work out as planned," he said.

"I kind of dreamt about going five straight in New York and probably the day

after I won New York last year I put on my calendar that part of my dream.

"Part of the reason you wake up every single day for 12 months and train until you are exhausted, is that you can come back here and go five straight – when that doesn't go to plan you get a little bit upset about it."

There was disappointment in the women's race for Blackpool's Shelly Woods, who despite being installed as the favourite in the days leading up to the race in the absence of last year's winner Edith Hunkeler crossed the line in 7th place.

Woods, who was looking to improve on her previous two successive silver medals looked uncharacteristically off the pace and was already down in seventh at the halfway point, with American athletes dominating the race.

21-year-old Tatyana McFadden picked up the gold medal after leading from beginning to end, with fellow Americans Christina Ripp and Amanda McGrory in second and third.

It was McFadden's first victory over the New York distance.

The New York marathon is now firmly established as one of the premier wheelchair racing events on the calendar, with a prize fund in excess of \$100,000, with the winner of each race picking up \$15,000.

Aggar pulls off victory

Paralympic rowing champion Tom Aggar showed his superiority over his rivals with an impressive win in the final of the Paralympic-class single scull at the World Championships in New Zealand.

For Londoner Aggar it was his third world gold to add to the Paralympic gold he won in 2008 and his two previous world championships wins since making his international debut in 2007.

"It feels fantastic", said

Aggar who led for almost all of the final to win by clear water in 5:19.36.

He said: "All the hard work in training and in the gym has paid off. I've really enjoyed the competition. I love rowing, I'm passionate about the sport".

Aggar's gold was followed by silver for the British mixed adaptive coxed four. Kate Jones, Ryan Chamberlain, James Roe and Kelsie Gibson, coxed by Rhiannon Jones, narrowly led the race

until the dying 100m when the Canadians surged to take a narrow lead and then held on to cross the line in 3:36.53 to Britain's 3:37.08.

Germany, last year's world champions, were third.

"It was a good race but it was also a bit of a blur", said Roe.

"We never led by more than a couple of feet and I couldn't say we were comfortable at any point", said the cox after a close battle.

"I wasn't sure where we had finished as we crossed the line", said Kate Jones.

"They were better than us

on the day and it was a good race".

Britain's crew included 17 year-old Kelsie Gibson and amputee Ryan Chamberlain who both emerged into the sport as part of a ParalympicsGB talent identification and development scheme.

Earlier there was huge disappointment for reigning Paralympic champion Helene Raynsford who was withdrawn from the final by the GB rowing team doctor as she had developed a respiratory dysfunction on the morning of the event.



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THEATRE

Dury's Graeae tribute



PATRICK BALDWIN



PATRICK BALDWIN

As I entered the theatre I was hoping that I would leave filled with theatrical luvvie style hyperbole ready to write my review. Instead I left with my head shouting, "IT'S REALLY, REALLY GREAT! GO SEE IT, GO SEE IT!"

Please allow me to elaborate.

Graeae Theatre's latest show, *Reasons To Be Cheerful* is a lively and heartwarming snippet in the lives of a group of Essex punks, as they battle to go and see Ian Dury play live at the Hammersmith Odeon in 1979. Now I was 14 in 1979 and Ian Dury was my hero, so I understand their desire to get to the gig (my mum said I was too young to go to London on my own so I didn't go – boo). However, that is selling this piece short. It's so much more. The superb story has it all. Love, life, death and Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll. And its pant-wettingly funny. I won't tell you too much more as I don't want to give the plot away.

The three main leads, Stephen Lloyd, Stephen Collins and Nadia Albina shine throughout the show. Karen Spicer's comedy timing is second to none as Pat, the mother, and Gary Robson gives acting gold as Bill/Bobby. The mechanism

of a play within a play really works, making the piece seem real and drawing the audience in.

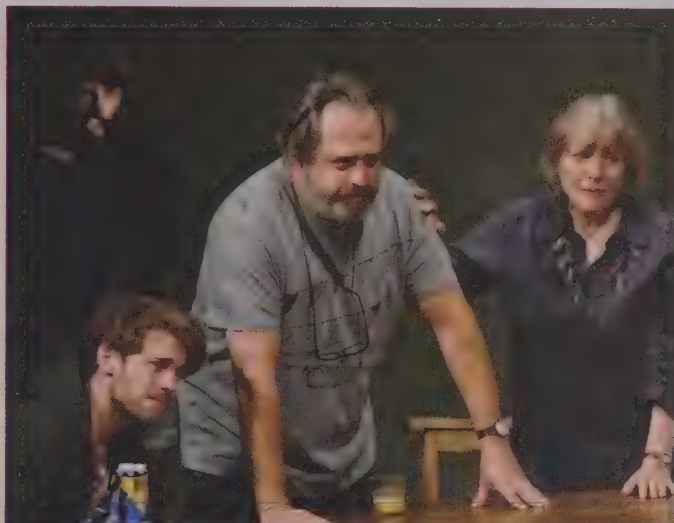
Threading through all this is the music of Ian Dury, performed brilliantly. John Kelly truly captures Dury's vocal style and the entire cast do every song proud. A nod must go out to Daniel McGowan not only for being great as the unlikeable Tory-voting Dave but also for playing the super difficult double saxophone solo in "Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick".

After the show Mat Fraser, who plays drums with the band (who knew he was such a good drummer – multi-talented git), asked me to be brutally honest in my review. He knows I was sacked from being a music reviewer with *Disability Now* many years back for my... (cough) honesty, and so knew my review would be truthful. Annoyingly RTBC is so good even I can't find fault.

Graeae are not only one of the best integrated theatre groups in the UK at the minute, they are one of the best theatre groups in the UK, period!

Do yourself a favour, go and see *Reasons To Be Cheerful*. Then go again. I know I will be.

THEATRE



SIMON ANNAND

Finding tribal identities

Deafness and the search for Deaf identity are at the centre of a family's drama in *Tribes* at the Royal Court theatre. **Mike Shamash** finds out how well it's explored

How do we define ourselves and how do others view us? These are the central themes of Nina Raine's play, "*Tribes*", currently running at the Royal Court theatre. We see a family sitting around a table, the parents Christopher and Beth with their children Daniel, Ruth and Billy. They are raucous, articulate, ambitious and opinionated. Christopher, played by Stanley Townsend, is a domineering academic and Beth, his wife played by Kika Markham, is a successful romantic novelist. Ruth wants to be a renowned opera singer

whilst Daniel wants to be a linguist. Billy is excluded from the competitive banter because Billy is deaf.

In the play, with a set elegantly designed by Roger Michell, we see how family can be both a comfort and a trap. Amidst all the talk, Billy is denied a voice because the family in their well-meaning attempts to treat each other as equals remain impervious and unresponsive to Billy's difference. Their identity comes at the expense of his.

To the family's evident displeasure, Billy

announces that he is attending a deaf club and is becoming aware of his Deaf identity. He has friends, he has a life and he announces triumphantly he has a girlfriend from the Deaf community. Nina Raine portrays a family whose sense of identity is challenged by someone entering a world where they are excluded. The father offensively compares Billy's girlfriend with an ex of Daniel's from the north of England. Later on, Billy refuses to use auditory language as an act

of self-defiance.

It is this theme that is central to the play. This supposedly informed, liberal family are as much victims of their own prejudices and tribalism as anyone else. This is much more evident when the family meets his new girlfriend, Sylvia, beautifully played by Michelle Terry and are forced to confront their prejudices.

The play is a powerful examination of how behind the mask of affluent, erudite people lurks

vulnerability, isolation and insensitivity. There is also an understanding that whilst identity can give us strength and support it can also be restrictive. It is telling when Sylvia despairs to Daniel about the sometimes claustrophobic nature of the Deaf community.

There are failings within the play; the family banter seems too mannered and

quite why Billy would be so isolated and misunderstood isn't made altogether clear. I also felt that in the second half plot devices are used that seemed a little fortuitous. These, though, are minor quibbles in a play which holds the cracks of family life to the light and examines movingly the isolation felt by disabled children in families.

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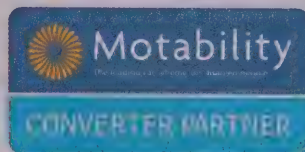
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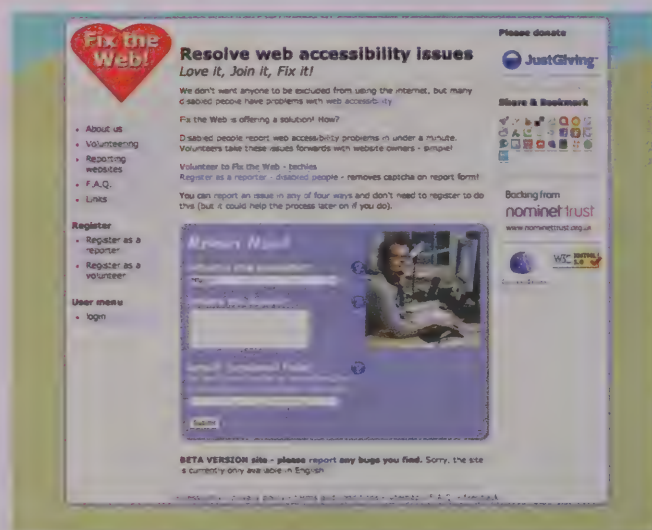
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webwatch



The fix is in



We've all experienced problems with websites before. Sometimes it's a minor irritation that can be worked around, but sometimes it's a major obstacle with no solution. **Léonie Watson** thinks that a new initiative from Citizens Online called Fix The Web could be the answer we're looking for

Fix The Web is based on a remarkably simple idea: get everybody helping to make the web a better place. Ask people with disabilities to report the problems they have with websites, recruit a large number of volunteers who'll get in touch with website owners, then bring the two together.

So how do you report a problem?

If you discover a problem accessing a website, it's not always easy to get in touch with the website owner. Assuming you can find the right contact information, you may not be comfortable describing the problem or using technical language. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has published some excellent

advice about contacting organisations with inaccessible websites, but Fix The Web aims to make it even easier.

There are three ways you can start reporting problems right now. You can send an email to post@fixtheweb.net, including the address of the website and a description of the problem. You can send a tweet containing #fixtheweb #fail, along with the address of the website and a brief description of the problem. You can go to the Fix The Web website and complete a very simple form.

What happens once you've reported a problem is it will be picked up by a Fix The Web volunteer, who will get in touch with the website owner on your behalf. At the time of writing there are more than 50 volunteers registered with Fix The Web, and more are joining every day.

The volunteers will alert the website owner to a reported problem. At the same time they will point to a range of resources on web accessibility, including information about the legal

requirements for web accessibility in the UK.

One concern that has been levelled at Fix The Web is that volunteers may not have the knowledge to correctly assess and report problems. But Gail Bradbrook, the person behind Fix The Web, is confident that the volunteers will be able to handle things well. With partners such as AbilityNet and the Nominet Trust, Fix The Web certainly has a strong supporting cast.

Can we really fix the web?

Aiming to fix 250,000 websites in the first two years is an ambitious goal. Yet Fix The Web will harness one of the fastest growing innovations on the web: crowd sourcing. That's you and I reporting problems as fast as we can find them, and a whole lot of volunteers contacting website owners to let them know. After all, if we all work together maybe we can fix the web between us?

- w3.org/WAI/users/inaccessible
- fixtheweb.net

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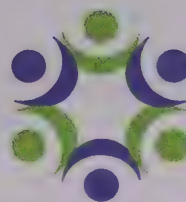
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worklife

As the man behind the much publicised Beagle 2 mission to Mars in 2003, **Professor Colin Pillinger** is one of Britain's most prominent space scientists. He tells *Disability Now* about the reasons for Beagle's ultimate demise, the ongoing quest to find life on Mars, having MS, and sending man back to the moon

Reach for the moon

I first got involved in space after finishing my PhD and went straight into working on the Apollo programme for NASA.

As a chemist, I happened to have the skills they needed. I worked with mass spectrometers, which are very good at analysing all sorts of stuff and I've now been working for 40 years building them. We even have one en route to a comet; it gets there in 2014.

The reason we wanted to send Beagle 2 to Mars was to repeat experiments done on meteorites that seemed to show there's life on Mars. The problem with meteorites that have landed on earth is that they could have picked up contamination, so the only way to challenge the doubting Thomases was to send the instrument to Mars to do the experiments there.

In 1997, I found out the European Space Agency (ESA) was thinking of sending an orbiter to Mars and I went along to them and said "you need to send a lander to look into this question of life."

We engineered it to be a



MIKE PEEL

well-known project. When we started, we didn't have any money. We had to convince a lot of people that it was worth working on, and we began by working for nothing. Eventually the Government gave us some money. However, the big problem was that we got it later than we needed it. If we had had it earlier, we could have avoided some of the risks we had to take. We were playing catch-up the whole time.

I'm now working with NASA to design a system that might be useful to go back to the moon – to the lunar south pole. There's a

lot of interest in the possibility of water being there, and the instrument we built for Beagle will be just as good to go and do that study.

The ESA has in mind that it wants to have a manned mission to the moon in the next decade, and it's interested in this polar site because it would have resources.

It would be going back to where I started. One of the things we wanted (during the Apollo mission) was to see if any of the moon rocks were sedimentary, to see whether the dark regions were in fact seas. It won't

be quite the same project but it would be nice to go back to the pole and study what might have happened if there was water there.

I now have MS. I'm not totally immobile but I couldn't run around like I did during Beagle, when I drove 200,000 miles in the space of six years.

There's nothing wrong with my brain: I can still think and talk, and I'm still active enough to think about working on the moon again. I'd also like to see the result of the mission to fly to a comet, because I started that 28 years ago.

To get to a comet you have to wind your spacecraft up like a clockwork spring, and every time you go round a planet you uncoil it and it goes a bit faster. What we have to do with this particular spacecraft is fly back in, and our instrument will be landed on the comet. That's not easy, as you have no idea what the situation is like on a comet, so it's very much a guess. I started in 1985, and when we get there it'll be 2014. I'd like to see the result of that: it's a quarter of a lifetime.

• Colin Pillinger was talking to Paul Carter

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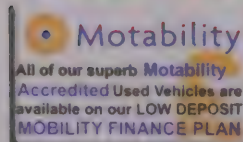
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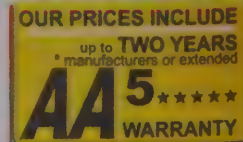
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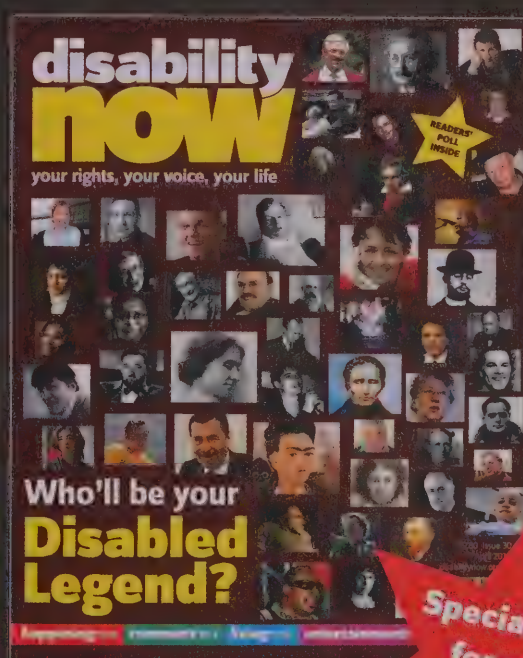
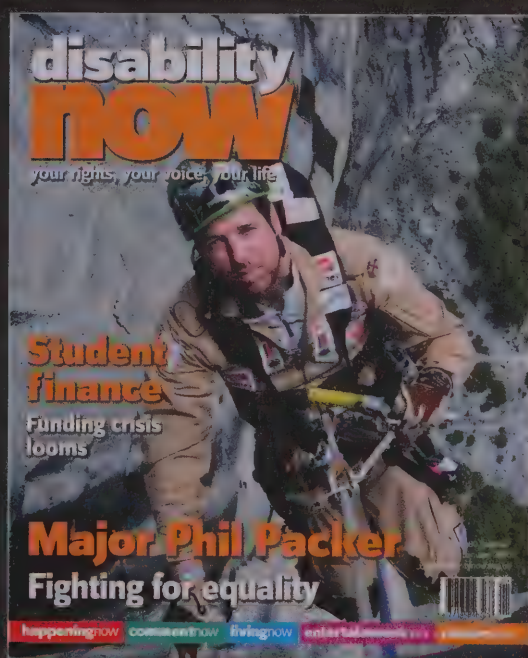


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Brent C.H.I.E.F.

Campaign for Housing, Independence, Equality, And Freedom

Brent CHIEF is important to Disabled People living in Brent at this point in time because poor Housing or poor access to housing is the single biggest issue we face and clearly impacts on the successful work we taken forward in promoting Independence, Equality and Freedom.

The difficulties we face will be compounded by Council Cuts, Benefit changes and increased charging for Community Care. Triple whammy!!! And that's before we find the bad mouthing of Disabled People over recent years by press, media and government alike increases the risk of hate crime and continuing unemployment.

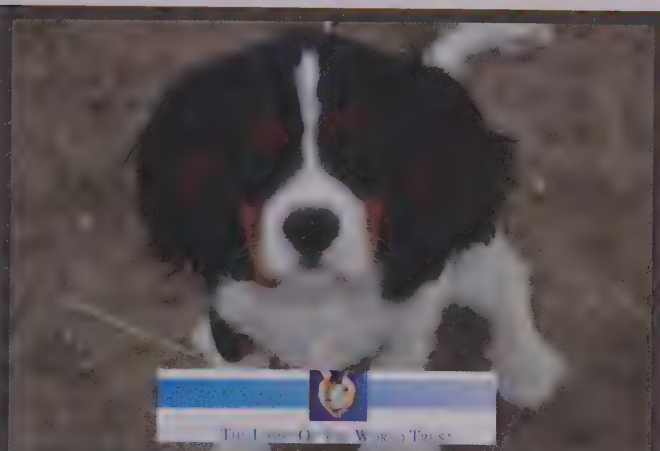
The work of Brent CHIEF is recognised by Brent Council and the Disability Movement which is agitating for a National Disability Housing Coalition based on the core principles of Accessibility, Affordability, Availability and improved Attitudes by housing providers.

Find out more: attend our next meeting on the first Tuesday of every month.
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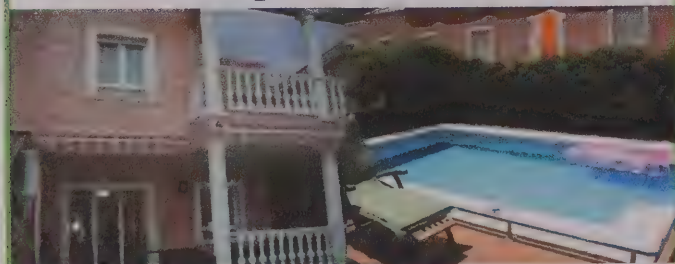
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DN DEADLINE

January 2011 published 21 December. Classified deadlines: Booking: 29 November. Copy: 1 December

backlash



Wheeling towards oblivion

As he's not getting any younger, **Paul Carter** ponders the choice between walking and wheels

I've been thinking lately, rare as that is, that now I've left the halcyon days of my twenties and misspent youth behind, it's only natural that I start looking ahead and planning for my golden years. Y'know, retirement and stuff. I'm not talking about boring things like mortgages and pension plans, I mean the cool stuff that you get to have later in life, such as speedy scooters and birds you can teach to shout obscenities. That kind of thing.

I'm being slightly disingenuous with the truth if I'm honest. I'm actually getting increasingly lazy, meaning that walking is creeping higher up the list of things I have massive dislike for*. It's currently sitting somewhere between "ironing" and "most people". (*for the benefit of DLA assessors this is what's not known in the trade as poetic licence)

Because of this, I think it's time I got myself a new wheelchair, while it's actually still possible to obtain one, and there's not some sort of Stasi force tipping us all out in order to



melt them down to make hat badges for bankers or something.

I do have a wheelchair already, but it's so old that it actually got condemned by the nice man who came to fix it last time. I don't mean condemned in the sense that he expressed complete disapproval. I mean in the sense that he actually condemned it like you would a building i.e. the next time I sat in it

there was every chance it might utterly collapse. Makes going out in it a bit like a crap version of Russian roulette.

Still trying to decide whether or not I should go for another wheeler, or save up for a powerchair, which I also used to have in days gone by. The electric wheelchair I used to have in my days as a student, that I used to drunkenly career around town in at the time,

“I'm actually getting increasingly lazy, meaning that walking is creeping higher up the list of things I have massive dislike for”

even had its own parking space marked out in masking tape in the entrance of the student union bar. Happy days.

It reminds me of a story from those days that still makes me smile. Some friends showed me a newspaper cutting from the local paper, which had a small story about police being called after a disabled man was driving his electric chair in the middle of the road at 3am, obstructing traffic. “By the time officers arrived, the man had vanished,” it said. I don't think it was me.

Actually, the more I think about it the more I'm coming round to the fact that this is a bad idea. I think I'll stick to walking. Otherwise I might not survive long enough to be at my own retirement party.

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